

THE
T R I A L

O F

A B R A H A M.

I N

F O U R C A N T O S.

H. W.

Translated from the GERMAN.

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74



T H E

AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

TH E proper object of poesy, from the nature thereof, and its relation to the human heart, is the Deity, and man in the principal ends of his existence, consequently religion and virtue. The splendid scene of nature, with all its beauties, is exhibited to us, that from such displays we may know our infinitely adorable Creator, and by a right use of the creatures, which chiefly depends on a just taste of goodness, beauty, and excellence, we may form ourselves to acquire that harmony of dispositions and powers, which nature offers to our imitation, and which constitutes the excellence and happiness of the moral man. Therefore, when poesy is called an imitation of nature, this, in its best sense, means, that the poetical representations of sensible beauties and gay images should ever be heightened by intellectual and moral beauties; as in nature the beautiful and good are ever conjoined, and those delightful objects which, on all sides, attract our senses, the Creator has invested with a thousand perfections, qualities, and relations, as monuments of his wisdom and goodness, and documents to man, and admonitions to the practice of virtue.

They who have not any such great idea of the worth and usefulness of poesy, may be assured that they are strangers to man's nature, and the right designation and exercise of his faculties. Can they believe that an activity of soul, aspiring to whatever is beautiful and excellent, a force of imagination ever conducted by a just taste and attachment to truth, together with an inward harmony of soul; I say, that all those talents, of which the total combination can alone form a real poet, were bestowed by the Creator for any meaner ends, than to be employed in a manner suited to man's most exalted designation; namely, to the glory of God, to set forth his works and revelations, and to enflame
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our hearts with piety and virtue, and with convictive energy instruct us in a right use of this life, and a preparation for a better.

They who are so happy as to be acquainted with the writings of Homer, Pindar, Sophocles, and Euripides, well know that this was their idea of poetry ; that they looked on the proper scope of it to be the advancement of religion, virtue, and morality ; and that, according to their several talents, and the circumstances of their times and country, they acted up to that glorious view. Even Homer, whose divinity, as he was obliged to conform to the Grecian model, is sufficiently absurd, abounds in such excellent doctrines, with regard to religion in general, that I cannot conceive how any one can be offended with Homer, as deficient in moral beauties. Such censors, it may be presumed, would knit their brows at Theophrastus's or La Bruyere's characters.

With these few observations it has been thought proper to introduce this poem, that they may, at the same time, serve as a preface to the others, which some valuable friends of mine and myself are jointly publishing, and thus make known our sentiments and purposes. To illustrate and recommend morality, to awaken in our readers a sense of religion and a love of virtue, to place before them examples of proper behaviour for men of all classes in the several relations of life, and likewise in extraordinary occurrences, is our professed design ; and if, at any time, our poems rise in morality any thing above Homer himself, it is to be ascribed to our divine religion. With us, truth and virtue alone deserve the ornaments of poetry ; we most heartily despise a wit void of that beauty which alone is pleasing to the Creator : As soon could we gaze with pleasure on a painted Messalina. I shall conclude with a passage from the inestimable Plato, but, alas ! now among us quite unknown : “ I take upon me to affirm, that we have no pretensions to good taste and genius, till we arrive at a feeling knowledge of wisdom, fortitude, and love of liberty ; till we are capable of more elevated thoughts, and more noble dispositions, and have a right relish of those virtues, and the portraitures of them. Poetry, indeed, is
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“ to be esteemed according to the pleasure it gives us ; yet,
 “ let it be remembered, that the best poem is always that
 “ which pleases the good and judicious, and especially those
 “ who more particularly distinguish themselves by discern-
 “ ment and moral excellency.”

ZURICH,
 8th Sept. 1753.

W.

THE



T H E
T R I A L O F A B R A H A M .

C A N T O I .

DAUGHTER of Heaven ! nursed among Eden's blooming hills, in more than golden times, who didst converse with Sipsa's daughters in the fragrant shades of paradise, their associate most endearing, thou goddess of song, parent of virtue, aid me to sing the triumph of obedient faith, the trial of resigned Abraham, who, at the divine command, subduing natural affection, led his son, a blooming youth, up Moriah as a destined victim ; O teach me to celebrate heavenly virtue in heavenly lays ! From past scenes withdraw the shrouding night, open to me a smiling prospect of that delicious spot, where Sarah, instilling into the youth early sanctity, fitted him for future converse with God and angels. Well were known to thee the transactions of that blessed family ; thou wert present at the birth of ancient events ; oft amidst Mamre's oaks didst thou walk, often in Haran didst thou visit the sweet-featured Ribkah, whose wished embraces were one day to reward Isaac's virtue. Indulge my request, O sacred muse ! Consecrate me thy priest ; emulous am I of Bodmern's fame, taught by thee how nobly he strikes the lyre in wisdom's praise ; with what a nervous flow he sings the ways of providence, the arms of virtue, and the sublimites of religion ! By thee, faint-like muse, were the bands of our amity tied ; thee shall my advanced years thank. Serena thanks thee that one shining year of my happy youth, interwoven with the days of a sage, has crowned my life : On that model form
my

thy heart ; form it to the noble simplicity, to the wisdom of the early world, which our times know not ; so shall I with more impassioned numbers display the full beauty of ancient manners, of the patriarchal virtues, and of incorrupt nature. From the grove where I sing, avaunt, ye who languid trill in praise of simpering Venus, or revelling roar to bloated Bacchus ; in the squalid cellars of the licentious town, hold your brutal orgies. It is to you, ye well principled fair, I consecrate my lays ; to you, who superior to a delusory education, would blush to unhallow virtue's name, giving it to ostentation or inane politeness : To you also I devote my lays, ye youths enamoured with wisdoms permanent charms ; but chiefly thee have I in view beloved Serena, excellent maid ! unknown ornament of thy sex, of human nature, to angels more known than to low-thoughted man. May the hymeneal union be the rich recompence of my pious song ; else, farae, spurn me from thy wings.

Now from the eastern hills advanced, serene the gladsome morn, which, from Haran, where in Nahor's house he had dwelt a year with the affectionate Milca, was to bring back lovely Isaac, the son of the promise ; with expanded wings it skimmed lucid over the plains along which lay Isaac's way : Abraham was already risen, and with smiling looks fixed on the eastern hills, he often fancied that through the impurpled glimmer he discerned the long-necked camels, and his paternal heart rejoiced in the deception of his eyes. Now, at the call of morning, and a holy impulse excited in him by the approach of God, he went up to a grove of cedars which crowned the summit of an adjacent hill ; here he had erected an altar for more solemn worship ; here with pure hands he burned to the Lord myrrh and cassia ; his orisons ascended with the grateful odours, and more grateful and higher their ascent, through all the heavens, even to the empyreal throne : Eternal goodness ! thus spoke the patriarch's heart and awed countenance, though silent his lips, thou who didst make choice of Abraham to declare thine infinite power to his kindred, author of that blessing which now rests on Isaac, thy best gift, the heir of thy promise, be thy servant permitted to praise thee, prostrate

trate in the dust: Grant that we, whom on earth thou deignest to favour with a sight of thee, may perform all thy will, even as the celestial essences perform it; for thine awful word governs seraphs and cherubs. O may Isaac walk with thee! O thou father of angels and men, indulge the affectionate supplication of a father's solicitous heart! O grant me to see the dear youth endued with heavenly sanctity, and worthy that the world's Saviour should arise from his offspring! O may this day, so serene and fair, restore him to thy suppliant! Thus prayed he with visage fixed on the ground.

And now a sudden effulgence diffuses itself over the hill, and with increasing radiancy, like a cloud of light, moved through the azure sky: Abraham lifted up his eyes, felt the presence of the Deity; an angel, by God's intuitive command, descended invisible, to strengthen the patriarch's eyes: At one look, for only of one is the human soul capable, he saw the divine glory through inconceivable ranks of adoring angels, between them Jehovah enthroned on cherubs; celestial scene, which verbal description would obscure! Under the divine aspect the son of earth sunk down trembling, but not without delight, pervades his whole frame, and he worshipped, falling on his face. Never had the Deity shewed himself to him with such pomp of majesty: Strange anxieties stir within his breast, but, strengthened by the ambrosial light, he again raised himself; when, from the deep silence of shaken heaven, issued Jehovah's tremendous voice: Abraham, take Isaac thine only son, with him go into the land of Moriah, and there on a mountain, which I shall shew thee, sacrifice him to me.

Abraham again fell on his face, and without communication of strength from the divine glory, lifeless had he fallen, struck with the thunder of the severe command; yet pierced it to the marrow of his bones: Sharp as the pangs were which rent his heart, he received the stroke summissively, not a single thought rose in opposition to the divine word; he worshipped, weeping in the dust, stretched out before the Lord, and his determined soul was now filled with more profound veneration and resigned obedience.

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The omniscient eye of God, to which futurity is present; and man's most hidden thoughts lie open, saw into Abraham's heart, saw the resigned obedience in which his soul with silent composure acquiesced; he saw also the act and triumph of devoted faith, and tacitly blessing his servant returned to heaven. In solemn silence cherubim and seraphim attended his way, and the æthereal effulgence mingled with the golden morn.

Now the patriarch rose to come down from the sacred hill: West of his mansion stood a grove of lofty oaks, forming a crescent around the peaceful cot; never had noon entered within its covert; and when the sun shot its hottest beams through the sultry atmosphere, here twilight breathed the refreshing cool; fit place for secret intercourse, or inviting to meditation! Hither Abraham withdrew, labouring under terrific sensations; scarce more terrific sensations agitated Adam's fond heart, when expelled from paradise with his weeping Eve; her tears brightning her charms, he saw behind him the happy fields, flowery vales, and trees with golden fruit; the festal bower, once gay witness of their connubial endearments; now withering; yet with mute sorrow he eyed it whilst in sight; then turned his dejected looks towards his future abode, which lay before him dreary, desolate, and dark; sad image of his changed life! Thus lonely, and oppressed with thought, Abraham retired amidst the solemn oaks; but soon his conflicted mind powerfully shook off the load of gloomy thoughts, and his sensations, gradually cleared from perplexity, thus severally vented themselves.

When the Infinite speaks; when he who makes the earth his footstool enjoins, when God deigns to talk with angels or men, reverential silence and immediate obedience becomes them. He, source of wisdom, planner of sacred destiny, alone knows the divine decrees; what is proper for him to do is well known to him; but the knowledge of cherubs it passeth; with him the heavenly host, were he to annihilate them with a blast of that breath which gave them being, could not contend. Angels expiring with their last sentiments must praise Jehovah the Lord of power, should it be his pleasure to silence their hymning voices by irretrievable

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able death ; and shall not I, of a nature so much more subject to death, so much beneath the angels, bow submissive to his behest ? But forgive, O Lord, that a father's sighs break in on my resigned silence ! O my Creator and Father, be not angry, that powerful nature still conflicts with thy will ! O permit me to bestow a few tears on a son, so deserving a son ! not so many tears as when in my arms, elate with joy, I first received the smiling babe. Thou knowest, as to thee all spirits are known, with what inward fervour I thanked thy loving-kindness for that best gift ; thou sawest the devout complacency I felt at the virtuous turn of his young soul, and my sedulity in the cultivation of it ; how amiable he grew, confirming the hopes from thyself derived ; O the exalted hopes, which now are utterly vanished ! But my fondness launches out into presumption. I obey, and with cheerful resignation adore thine unsearchable command, O strengthen me, strengthen me, Father, that not a single movement of my heart may rise up against the divine disposal ! thy will be done.

Thus cried he with raised eyes, and restrained the suffusing tears. From an argent cloud, Elhanan, a celestial essence, Isaac's angel, saw in the patriarch's placid aspect his pious resignation, and in his eyes, directed towards heaven, adoring homage, veneration unfeigned ; though a gentle grief had bereft his eyes and lips of their smiles : that scene drew tears even from the angel, who turning towards his associate Eliza, thus addressed him :

Hast thou, my heavenly friend, since thou hast been conversant with man, and even in Eden thou wast, hast thou ever seen such a triumph of piety, such an elevation of soul, such submission to the Deity, such resignation ? O thou father of the faithful, thou devout hero, thou glory of mankind, and favourite of God, how I esteem thee ! See, Eliza, what a dignity serene virtue kindles in his countenance ! One only have I known of such nobleness of mind ; thou knewest him, Eliza, thou didst assist in the triumphant procession, which, with jubilant acclams, conveyed him up through the portal of life, Enoch the friend of God : to him the virtuous Mehala bore an only son, his comely semblance ; a heavenly spirit shone in his opening beauty, and
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promised the purest sanctity : in this youth Enoch's declining years rejoiced ; in him he saw his whole self renewed ; and the raptured father's dearest employ was to form his pliant heart for the highest hopes. But of the innocent joy of these elate hopes was he deprived by a most awful stroke ; the youth was taking a lonely walk in the valley near their cot, when suddenly a midnight tempest involves the heavens, thunders roar, lightnings flash, the clouds at once blaze ; the mother aghast runs, anxious for her son, when, struck by a directed flash, the sacred fire consumed his earthly part ; yet in the flames descended an angel, who, on his celestial wings, up to the radiant sphere of beatitude, conveyed the astonished soul. By her son's ashy course, immoveable in grief and horror, stood Mehala, when Enoch hastening to her, instead of the model of his youth, the heir of his piety, saw only a few ashes ; saw the ashes of his only son, and the mother disconsolate : this he saw, and sunk not under the spectacle of double woe ; his magnanimous faith suppressed the intrusions of complaint, and with composed mein, raised heavenward, thus he spoke : Of a truth, the Lord hath lifted up his voice from heaven, in the tempest hath he uttered his words, in the flame he hath stretched down his right hand, and taken up the boy yonder into his rest. Are we to bewail him as our nursing and delight ? What if he be taken from us, it is not to his loss. Does he suffer by entering into the eternal state, perhaps eight hundred years before the usual term would allow him to rejoice in the approach of dissolution ? Let us rather thank God, for conferring on him that blessing which for us is still postponed.

He said, and kneeling praised the Lord of life and death : so high, my heavenly friend, can human virtue soar ; and what a joy is the virtuous man to us ! But oh ! how I feel for the tried father's distress, the pangs which wring his bleeding heart ! though silent and collected in himself he stands ; well-grounded is his heroism, his heart is girt with strength, like a seraph habited in the armour of God, sedate he waits the event, steady as a rock struck by the ignited bolt ; whilst I tremble and weep, pitying him, especially at the agonies into which the dreadful tidings will throw

throw the tender mother. O that for ever it could be hid from her ! Ah, how wilt thou bear it, thou most tender of mothers ; sure thy fond heart will break, whilst thy mournful eye, fixed on heaven, sue in vain for the denied relief of tears. Away, tenebrous scenes, your terrors overpower me ! how then will they distract the mother ! Dear seraph, never has a child of Adam sucked the breasts of a more affectionate woman : Eve, fond as she was, when she became a mother, never with sweeter effusions of fondness pressed her smiling firstling to her exulting heart, then Sarah her babe, as the promised of God, as the image in which she saw all the attractive grace of her youth, ennobled with Abraham's dignity of aspect. The youth was the chief subject of her petitions, her morning care, and last thought in which sleep overcame her ; even in flattering dreams she caressed the beloved phantom, or rejoiced at the visionary representation of some remarkable prosperity or distinction ; she saw him blessed in a spouse, in every worth eminent, and an offspring becoming such parents ; she even more than once saw, and though sleeping, her devout breast heaved with joy, more than once saw the divine Redeemer, Isaac's adorable descendant, clothed in his humanity ; saw him, worshipped him, and ecstasied, called him Redeemer. Celestial friend, I perceive thy tears rising ! thy benevolent sympathy melts me ! Isaac is to die ; Sarah is to see the dear youth die, or the father return imbrued with the blood of his son ! Can it displease the Creator that such woes move us ? Woes which shake angelic firmness, woes above all sorrow, yet such as his inscrutable wisdom lays on the noblest of mankind.

Thus spoke Elhanan ; and to him his associate ; Seraph, my heart dissolves with compassion, though unknown to Isaac and Sarah ; whereas thou, by divine charge, with protecting wings hoverest over their sinless life, seest them continually, thyself invisible, and observest their refined sentiments and irreproachable deportment : yet my heart is melted in silent concern : But a radiant thought, a gliding gleam of hope, O my celestial friend ! shews to me these afflicting appearances terminating in joy. Dark to us are Jehovah's decrees, he alone knows what is fit for the God-head

head to do ; this is beyond the verge of seraphims ; scarce is the cherub of highest confidence permitted access to the sanctuary, one single look into the golden tables of destiny where futurity is enrolled immutable, yet even through the depths of divine decrees I still descry a ray of hope. The goodness of our Sovereign, thou knowest, is unlimited ; the bliss of spirits has ever been his favourite aim : Love is his name ; he styles himself Love ; thus manifested he himself to us angels, when at our creation we incircled him in jubilant rings ; so will he to the people of the earth, so will he manifest himself in every ætherial world, in every Olymp : Yes, my celestial friend, such also shall he shew himself to Abraham and Sarah ; soon will the admirable design of his command unveil itself ; whatever grief he sends, joy ever is the issue.---But yonder in the sun, Uriel, with front of superiority, beckons to me, and due subordination requires my speedy compliance ; thou, who remaining amidst the dimness of terrestrial day, art to see the progress of this abstruse event, in a season of familiar converse relate to me the issue, sad or joyful.

He said, and having embraced the seraph, shot up to the sun, whilst Elhanan hastened towards Isaac on a shining cloud, with which, as with a vesture, he encompassed the journeying youth.

The umbrageous grove still saw Abraham within its recesses, immersed in thought, but in spirit nearer to God than naturally the earthly state comports ; but to his servant Eliezer, a man of sacred virtue, and well deserving the patriarch's confident esteem, for in him was lodged the whole care of his domestic œconomy, comes an eager messenger, bringing advice that Isaac was within a few hours of Arba ; the worthy Eliezer with alert gladness hastens to his lord, and thus with precipitate voice communicates to him the message which to himself had given such effuse joy,

At length, O happiest of fathers, here is the golden day which we have all so much longed for ; with resplendent velocity it hastens, as rejoicing to restore Isaac to thy benediction, and his mother's embrace. A messenger brings word that we shall see him in a few hours. Already the
voice

voice of festivity resound among the huts ; his exulting companions are decking their hair with chaplets, and the damsels tune their instruments, to receive their young master with festal melody ; all join in shouts of grateful affection. But ah ! my Lord ! what do I see ? A mute disquietude clouds that brow, ever so serene ; thou answerest only with deep sighs. Joy beams in the faces of all thy family, and thine speaks dejection. Sad mystery ! Let not my lord be offended, that, moved by love, I ask what heart-felt affliction can damp the gladness which thy son's safe return everywhere imparts.

Eliezer trembling heard Abraham thus reply : O Eliezer ! is the lot of man so little known to thee, that thou wonderest to see sorrow in my countenance, at thy bringing me a message in itself so joyful ? Real joy does not always attend the dance and song. God, who at his sovereign pleasure deals out to men their lengths of life unequally, mingles some drops of enjoyment with the calamities of the most distressed ; and overcasts the fairest splendor of the prosperous with intervals of darkness and tempest. In seeking to know the cause of that anguish, which, against my will, saddens my look, thou tearest open the closing wound, and wilt draw on thine honest heart a crushing load of sorrow.

My Lord, I tremble at such words from thy mouth. What can it be ? Such fixed melaacholy in thine uplifted eyes ; how it alarms me ! What can darken thy prosperity ! What blessings has not God poured down on thy cheerful family ! Is not the beloved spouse of thy bosom living ? and the messenger sent by thy son says he is in perfect health : His words were, that our young Master flourishes like an almond-tree fostered by the dew of heaven ; all who see him are charmed with his deportment, and the ripening beauty of his aspect is expressive of the purest virtue, and the most amiable dispositions. What should thus afflict thee is to me inconceivable. May thy servant be permitted to speak ? Has some vision of the night presented portentous imagery to thy mind ? Has some angel, like him which exhibited Sodom in flames, given thee a terrifying view of any future disaster ? May the Ruler of Heaven avert the calamity from thee on the head of his blasphemous enemies !

With

With serene visage, and accents of benign gravity, the good patriarch answered : Thy virtuous demeanour, and the wisdom by which God hath distinguished thee, have long since won my heart ; thou knowest with what affectionate confidence it reposes itself on thine : and now also shall I disclose it to thee. This morning, at sun-rise, as I was offering an oblation on the consecrated mount, the Lord appeared to me : and never did I behold him in such celestial state. He sat exalted on a throne of cherubs ; he passed through infinite ranks of radiant angels, reverentially covering their faces with their azure wings. Certainly some Olympic essence must have strengthened my sight, to sustain the effulgence of the divine countenance. The Lord called me by my name ; and ordered, that I should take my dear son Isaac into the land of Moriah, and there slay him as a sacrifice. My purpose is, to set out to-morrow, at the first appearance of light, and execute the divine injunction.

Eliezer was now no longer master of himself : He had listened to every word with trembling, and dreadful surmises ; but on hearing the severe command, and the father's prompt obedience, his full heart discharged a stream of tears. He loved the father ; and still dearer to him was the son, his precious charge ever since his weaning. The boy's sprightly innocence, early opening itself to virtue ; his attention, docility, and pleasure, in learning the sayings of sages couched in apologues and verses ; his amiable disposition and blossoming virtues, none of which escaped Eliezer's fond observance, had so far endeared him to the good old man, that he looked not on his own son with more tenderness. Overpowered by these tidings, his virtuous sorrow shewed itself strongly marked in his ingenuous countenance ; but Abraham eyed him with tranquil patience.

Oh doleful tidings ! thus Eliezer, with interrupting sobs, poured forth his anguish : Oh distressed father, what sayest thou ! Oh unfortunate son, cut off in thy promising bloom ! and by thy father's hand, the hand of him who gave thee life ! and this by the command of God ! God, who himself come down from Olympus to announce his birth, and blessing Sarah, consecrated her as the happy mother of the promised child ! who, in thee, O excellent youth ! shewed
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voice of festivity resound among the huts; his exulting companions are decking their hair with chaplets, and the damsels tune their instruments, to receive their young master with festal melody; all join in shouts of grateful affection. But ah! my Lord! what do I see? A mute disquietude clouds that brow, ever so serene; thou answerest only with deep sighs. Joy beams in the faces of all thy family, and thine speaks dejection. Sad mystery! Let not my lord be offended, that, moved by love, I ask what heart-felt affliction can damp the gladness which thy son's safe return everywhere imparts.

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With serene visage, and accents of benign gravity, the good patriarch answered : Thy virtuous demeanour, and the wisdom by which God hath distinguished thee, have long since won my heart ; thou knowest with what affectionate confidence it reposes itself on thine : and now also shall I disclose it to thee. This morning, at sun-rise, as I was offering an oblation on the consecrated mount, the Lord appeared to me : and never did I behold him in such celestial state. He sat exalted on a throne of cherubs ; he passed through infinite ranks of radiant angels, reverentially covering their faces with their azure wings. Certainly some Olympic essence must have strengthened my sight, to sustain the effulgence of the divine countenance. The Lord called me by my name ; and ordered, that I should take my dear son Isaac into the land of Moriah, and there slay him as a sacrifice. My purpose is, to set out to-morrow, at the first appearance of light, and execute the divine injunction.

Eliezer was now no longer master of himself : He had listened to every word with trembling, and dreadful surmises ; but on hearing the severe command, and the father's prompt obedience, his full heart discharged a stream of tears. He loved the father ; and still dearer to him was the son, his precious charge ever since his weaning. The boy's sprightly innocence, early opening itself to virtue ; his attention, docility, and pleasure, in learning the sayings of sages couched in apologues and verses ; his amiable disposition and blossoming virtues, none of which escaped Eliezer's fond observance, had so far endeared him to the good old man, that he looked not on his own son with more tenderness. Overpowered by these tidings, his virtuous sorrow shewed itself strongly marked in his ingenuous countenance ; but Abraham eyed him with tranquil patience.

Oh doleful tidings ! thus Eliezer, with interrupting sobs, poured forth his anguish : Oh distressed father, what sayest thou ! Oh unfortunate son, cut off in thy promising bloom ! and by thy father's hand, the hand of him who gave thee life ! and this by the command of God ! God, who himself come down from Olympus to announce his birth, and blessing Sarah, consecrated her as the happy mother of the promised child ! who, in thee, O excellent youth ! shewed
us

us the divine hope, the guide of our life, and our support in death, God the Messiah, the felicity of the restored earth; issuing from thy progeny. This God orders thee to be slain ! my dearest pupil must die ! That eye, beaming a divine spirit, shall no more smile at me with tenderest cordiality. No longer, in evening walks, shall I warm his generous heart, reciting the heavenly lives of his ancestors, and the high expectations of his parents. Alas ! in vain did Sarah with devout fervour, clasp thee in thy childhood to her breast, and with a flow of rapturous gratitude, mingle tears of joy over thee ! Alas ! in vain has Eliezer loved thee ! in vain, accompanying Elihu's strings, has he sung to thee the hymns of the righteous of old, conveying sanctity and religious knowledge ! Where now is my hope, that he would be the kind support of my declining years, and that his angelic life should delight my eyes in the dimness of old age ! Sweet hope, thou art vanished like a morning cloud, like the lamentation of a father, who, on the death of a child, raves with excess of momentary grief ! O my lord, once of fathers the most happy, how thy fate wrings my heart ! now every joy is withered, every hope is blasted, like a cedar struck by the rending thunder ! O Sovereign of Heaven, forgive these culpable wailings, if to deplore Isaac's fate can be culpable ! I shudder ; my whole frame sinks under an overwhelming strife of ideas. The heir of the first promise, is he to die ! shall with him also die the Word of the eternal Father ! Will he no longer be called our gracious Preserver ! Shall the earth, which in my too hasty exultation, I already saw consecrated by the walk of the divine incarnate Redeemer, distained with his blood, and filled with witnesses of the most exalted truths, with true children of faith ! Shall the rejected earth remain in everlasting darkness, a prison of sinners ! what then will be the state of us and our descendants ? Is then the renovation of the earth, shewn me in a sequestered hour of contemplation, even by an angel, an inane vision ? No : The word of the Lord stands firmer than a mountain of brass ; sooner shall worlds pass away. He hath spoken it. But wherefore then require the heir to be slain ! him on whom it rests ! the progenitor of the great Messiah ! Here my mind bewilders itself in sevenfold night ; I stand aghast.

Without

Without such manifest tokens of a divine apparition, scarce could I have credited the reality of such a tale, though from my Lord's lips.

Thus spoke Eliezer, and would have vented farther complaints, had not Abraham's superior virtue interrupted him. Eliezer, thine affectionate complaints I hear with gratitude. Can I be insensible to the tears which wet thy venerable face, tears shed for Isaac? Yet, my friend, to hear from thy lips complaints, to obtain a revocation of heaven's denounced will; complaints of doubt and mistrust, hurts my heart more than its own pressures. But God, knowing thy fidelity and virtue, will forgive the unmeant offence. Lay not so much to heart my distress. If I suffer, the Lord knows why he makes me to suffer, and what load I can bear. Affliction from the hand of God should to man be more welcome, than the liveliest joys by himself procured. Readily my will obeys him to whom the heavens pay obedience. Thus I suffer resigned, and hold my peace. But if thine own loss in Isaac so powerfully affects thee, as the expected comfort of thy decrepid years, let thine heart be comforted by my sufferings. How much greater my loss? Brightest views of noblest felicity, a constellation of joys, setting in the shadows of death, of such a death! They were at hand; they were not illusory hopes, nor wishes of dust, which one breath of God disperses. No; EL ELOA himself shewed them to me; often did I converse with seraphs concerning them; they were the chief wish of my devout forefathers; he who gave them, now takes them away. As a father my heart bleeds, yet, resigned, I bow to God's sovereignty, and obey without a murmur. Shall not he deal with his creatures according to his will? Who shall say to him, what dost thou? What frenzy were it in a weak creature, a worm, a fading flower, to pretend to wiser measures than those of God? Besides, is any thing which we possess absolutely ours? But lest of all the seed by divine blessing animated! and still less was Isaac mine! Supernaturally did the Lord give him me. He, who for hidden views sent him now recalls him. But how! I, his father, am to sacrifice him! And is the father's hand less the creator's than that of a stranger? Yes, this right arm, however it may

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tremble

tremble under the reluctance of nature, shall execute its Maker's will. Oh ! endearing appellation of father, to the ear and heart so sweet, when lisped by sportive children, amidst their embraces, it is only by human ties, and to perishable creatures, that thou bindest us ; thy claims must cease when God cancels them. At his will, the hand, which fondly used to stroke the smiling boy's cheeks, must plant the dagger in his breast. Thus says the fear of the Lord ; such is the love of true wisdom. Often to my ancestors it gave such instructions ; they obeyed, they suffered, and now are crowned. Perplex not thyself how God will fulfil thy promise. Millions of means, to men, to angels perhaps, unsearchable, are in his hand, to carry his purposes into execution. Compose thyself, and with pious confidence sooth thy sorrows. Leave me now, but in thy trusty breast keep the melancholy secret ; let not thy looks encourage any saddening conjecture ; nor hinder thou the youths from receiving my son with their intended songs and dances, and all their affectionate merriment.

So spoke the faithful patriarch. Eliezer, though trouble weighed down his soul, in silent respect withdrew, deeply impressed with his lord's exalted wisdom : For who, indeed, feels not thee, piety, spark of the heavenly light, enkindled by the Deity, of seraphs the most glorious radiance ! when thou appearest in thy beauty, who but must love thee ! Even under chastisements we love thee ! Rankling affliction and complaint, that murmuring rebel to Divine Providence, are hushed before thee, and shun the resplendency with which thou vestest the soul of thy illuminated favourites ! Strengthened by thee, Abraham, with pious magnanimity, sustained the severest shock. Thus girded with divine force, stood Michael on the celestial field, imbrued with angelic blood, among the apostate bands, and serenely braved the thundering strokes of God's impotent foes.

Still Abraham remained within the covert of the grove, a thousand thoughts distracted his heart, yet over all prevailed virtue ; virtue which God from blissful Olympus has to few imparted, supremely predominant over the soul, rejoicing in unreserved obedience to the Deity. Among other thoughts which agitated him, was Sarah, the youth's fond

fond mother : Whether he should make God's command known to her, before the execution of it ? This at first seemed best. His heart, indeed, recoiled at the idea of the agony into which this would throw her ; the sense of the woe will be fainter, if concealed till all is over ; yet to such an affectionate mother, it may be some consolation to pour forth her anguish in her dear son's embraces : But no ! mistaken thought ! the separation would be too much for her gentle heart ! Every look of his tender innocence, every glance of his sympathizing eye, would be death to her ! And how could I force him from her embrace ? Ah, how could I ! And my son ! what though in his noble mind an ardour glows, aspiring to the height of every virtue, could he, without the most convulsive emotions, see his dearest mother in such pangs ? Even I could scarce stand such a sight ! It is resolved. I will keep my affliction to myself, and leave her the pure enjoyment of this day's raptures, a few remaining hours of complacency. May she, in the short term, feel the human delight of being a mother in all its extasy ! But when the veil of concealment must be drawn, when her dear son's fate must be communicated, O merciful Creator, strengthen her ! thou, who knowest of what we are made, support her precious life.

So saying the patriarch moved towards his mansion ; his aspect was moulded to tranquility, but unspeakable distress possessed his heart.

The End of CANTO I.

THE

T H E

TRIAL of ABRAHAM.

C A N T O II.

NOON had now spread its lucid garment over the firmament, and hastened on the hour by Sarah passionately longed for. Isaac, with a train of slaves, returns from Nahor's house. On the hill, whence with wandering eye he looked joyful down on Mamre's vales, his companions, in two blooming troops, met him jubilant with songs and dances. Isaac leaping from the docile camel, threw himself in his favourite Asael's arms; he also kissed Abel and Dedan, and Karmi, amiable youths, and born under Abraham's roof. But his heart urged him to haste; the sight and gratulations of his associates only winged his detestable impatience to receive Sarah's kisses, and embrace Abraham's knees. Both, but not with like sensations, under the cloud-capt cypresses, which formed an umbrageous arch over their mansion, waited his coming. O how his heart panted! How he flew towards Sarah's embrace! and she, with all the eagerness of maternal fondness, hastened to him, and elapsed him to her throbbing heart, which amidst the ebullitions of her joy dissolved within her. As a virtuous bride receives her worthy spouse, when after seven mournful years of absence, indulgent providence brings him back; with him comes the brightness of days, a completion of their wishes, the recompence of fidelity. The ecstasied fair receive him in her arms, and with kisses of pure affection mingles tears, excess of joy suppressing her speech. Such emotions felt Sarah amidst Isaac's embraces; tears of rapture burst on the youth's glowing cheeks. Speak she could not, so full was her impassioned heart. Abraham beheld the affecting interview. Now his firmness sinks under nature. He looks up to heaven with suppliant eyes, and tears trembling in them. The youth gently winds himself from his mother's arms to pay his duty

to his beloved father ; throwing himself down before him, he embraces his knees, and with exulting accents cries, bless me again, O father ! once more bless me ! O thrice blessed be the God of Abraham ! I again see thy face ; again with all thy wonted tenderness thou lookest down on thy son. A shuddering inexpressible, a shuddering excited by joy and grief, seized the father, to whom never had that indearing appellation sounded more sweet and terrible. Yet collecting the whole vigour of his mind, he uttered the desired benediction.

Blessed be thou, my son ! blessed be thou, son of God's promise ! the Lord, who chuses thee for himself, be a father to thee, and bless thee, and give thee whatever is good in his sight !

Sarah observed the patriarch's tears, not tears of complacency ; and in his countenance full of affection, marks of inward anguish ; but too great was her joy to admit of any saddening apprehensions, yet laid she up in her heart Abraham's solicitous aspect. Isaac returns to her, and she again receives him with all the effusions of her first salutations. Now joy subsisting from their agitated bosoms into which it hath rushed in a full stream, in gentle undulations diffused itself through every vein : And their freed powers of speech vented their sentiments in lively converse, such as native cordiality and innocence inspire. The scarce Elphanan, Isaac's celestial friend, hovered over him, pleased at the affectionate reception of his beloved ; and with humid eyes look down on the pensive patriarch, Sarah's renewed beauty, which shone like the purple evening of the fairest winter's day.

Festivity soon spreads through all the huts round the afflicted patriarch's tent. In sprightly airs join the voices of useful lips and the sound of harps. Behind the tent, in an alabaster rock, was hewn an elegant bath : Thither two servants led their young master, whom having washed they anointed with richest nard. He now vests himself with linen robe, and golden girdle encompasses his well-formed waist. Thus attired in all the gracefulness of youth and beauty, he returns to the tent. So among the flowery vales, through the scented air, descends the smiling spring :
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Around her trip the golden hours : And attending plenty, from its full horn profusely pours exumbrance ; the plants and flowers expanding heighten the delightful scene. Abraham in lovely Isaac sees the youth of charming Sarah. Such was the juvenile red which flushed in her lilly cheeks. Thus her eyes charmed each beholder ; such was the oval turn of her face ; and thus as graceful was her port ! The mother in her dear son re-traces the combined dignity and mildness which graced the father's youth. Thus did a divine spirit manifest itself in his expressive looks. Thus did the vivacity of his mind enliven the seriousness of his aspect. Thus doubly they saw and doubly loved each other in Isaac. But stronger at each look did Abraham's convulsed heart beat ; scarce could he command his eyes.

Now the hour of repast called them. Neat-handed damsels nimbly crowned the festal table with artless food, and crystalline water to drink ; for nature requires but little, and rational cheerfulness stands not in need of the mantling wines dangerous incentive. The repast ended, and thanks offered to the bounteous giver, Sarah thus began her discourse to Isaac : Now that the ardour of my first joy at seeing thy dear face again is something abated, I feel a new desire. I would know how you left our worthy relations. How is Milkah, that most intimate and beautiful companion of my youth ? I hope it is also well with the sons she has borne to Nahor ; and likewise with Bethuel's daughter, of whose beauty so much is said ? But first, my dear child, tell us how you lived at Haran, during the many long months we were deprived of you here, that hearing the agreeable story from thee, we may in some measure enjoy that lost time. Isaac bowed his head in token of ready compliance. At once the voices and music cease ; the songstresses at once break off their melody. Timnah, Sarah's favourite slave, in person and qualities deservedly so, had sung the joys of meeting friends, and the sentiments of hearts unknowingly loving each other. She sang of the daughters issued from Zepha to people paradise, and of Noah's sons : How at last an angel shewed Japhet the way, and led him into the garden, where with sweet admiration, he saw the illustrious sisters, and became enamoured

ed of the youngest, who strayed behind to hear him. How the heavenly minded Sipa, conducted by Noah's sons, came to Noah with the children of paradise. She sang their affectionate meeting, and their blissful life.

These were the subjects of thy harmony, lovely Timnah : But on Isaac's sign of compliance with his mother's desire thou didst cease, and fixing thy curious eye on the youth, on his opening his mouth hadst forget thy lute. The whole family gathered around, and stood in attentive silence. At Abraham's left sat Eliezer ; on Sarah's right, the pious Keturah, her domestic assistant ; and next to her Timnah, the leader of the harmonic choir. Next to Isaac was seen Asael, as most resembling him, giving daily displays of a divine temper.

As in a serene evening love-lorn Philomela, attendant on the spring, enlivens the shady grove ; not a leaf stirs, the breezes are hushed, and the songsters are assembled on the branches, with extended necks, listen, charmed with notes surpassing imitation. Thus musical was the voice of the divine youth ; and thus silent were the circle round him, to hear the pleasing narrative.

Nahor's blessed house to which Bethuel brought me, soon became to me another Mamre. Milkah's affectionate endeavours to be a Sarah to me, were it possible, soon removed what regret I at first felt, and restored cheerfulness to my looks ; and often by a delightful deception, when she fondly kissed me, as she was wont, she seemed to me the very mother in whose embraces I had lately wept. Also, in a dream of the night, a bright angel came down to me and comforted me, by saying, that God would take care of me, and I should again see my father's house. So that my heart soon attained to a constant quiet : I again felt the smile of heaven, and conversed with those dear friends, free from all uneasiness or apprehension. The hours were all spent in peace and amusements, with stated intervals for worshipping God. Sometimes I used, with my companions, to range the hills about Haran in quest of flowers, and to observe nature's process in them. Often I used to sit at Nahor's feet, whilst he talked of the knowledge and manners of our fore-fathers ; how they lived to the Lord, and how they had intercourse with the angels, and even with

with God himself. Nahor's wisdom is tempered with exceeding gentleness ; and I never thought him too long in his stories. At Haran I also saw works of ingenuity and imitative art : For on some men the Creator has bestowed a spirit of invention, and they make images of warriors and patriarchs in marble ; from shapeless blocks, in a few months, I saw many human figures made, in lively postures which looked as if, though stone, they had been real life. What most affected me was a succession of patriarchs ; there is no beholding them without veneration. Also some I saw of molten gold cast in human forms, which are placed on pedestals. Music also flourishes in Haran. The shepherdesses with their sweet lays, composed by young shepherds, cheer the solitary fields. But among them none are to be compared to Bethuel's daughter. Her singing is like that which, when a child, I sometimes conceived to hear from angels, when asleep. As for beauty, Ribkah, for that is her name, is like the celestial morning of that day, when God resting from creation, ascended into heaven to proclaim the most sacred of days. When she tends the sheep among the flowers, all seems spring around her. I think her smiles are like angels. My heart, as it were, melts within me. O that Providence had given me a sister, how would I love her ! And if Ribkah were she, how exceedingly would I love her ! We are indeed brother and sister, as descended from Pharah, and we love each other as such ; Milkah too loves us children. We three have often sat in an arbour ; and Ribkah has sung to her lute the beauty of virtue ; and virtue itself cannot be more charming than her face and singing. I listened to her, as if out of myself ; with tears I used to embrace my sister ; then Milkah would bless us both. I found my heart healed, as it were, with new thoughts, thoughts, charming and innocent as Ribkah, bore me on their wings to the very gates of heaven. O how lovely ! how delightful in practice did blessed virtue then appear to me ! I loved it ever, but seemed to love it better as I saw it in Ribkah. Tell me, my dear mother, you had brothers and sisters, was not that the natural tie between sisters and brothers, which warmed our hearts when we saw each other ? Sometimes when I was wander-
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ing in a grove to hear the nightingale, I felt a soft whispering in my heart, a strange impulse, to go to some particular place; and there I found Ribkah tending her sheep, O how sweet were those hours! and she was never tired in hearing me till the stories which my father and Eliezer had taught me: and as little tired was I to hear her charming voice, singing the pious songs which she had learnt from Abiasaph, a poetical youth, the only son of Kenas of Haran, by Isca Milkah's sister. At his birth the heavenly muse touched his breast, and consecrated him to poetry and musick. And though he had seen but eighteen springs, yet composed he verses which persons of famed wisdom has approved. He is the prince of the youth; every shepherdes strives to deserve the poet's praise; but it is virtue alone on which he will bestow praise, and without it he allows of no beauty. Abiasaph was my most intimate friend; for though his age by some years exceeds mine, and he has much more knowledge than I, yet finding in me an inclination to virtue, and a sameness of disposition, he took me into his friendship, and not a day passed without our being together. One evening, dear mother, you shall hear some songs of his, and I'll teach them Timnah. Our friendship was so delightful, that I could hardly have borne my leaving Haran, were not my dear father and mother more to me than Abiasaph and Ribkah. Thus I have related to you my life at Haran. But I must not forget an accident, where the God of our family shewed a particular care of me. Listen to it, mother; but do not be too much terrified at hearing the great danger from which his angel delivered me. Abiasaph and I one morning took a walk to a cedar grove a little without Haran, and as we went along we were singing a hymn of his composing, when behold a bird appears with all the colours of the rainbow, beautiful beyond any I had ever seen. And our admiration was increased by its notes, which sounded like silver strings, and seemed to speak different passions. When it ceased, Abiasaph answered it with his lute. Immediately it flew down from the branch, and hovered over him, expressing its pleasure by frequently clapping its wings. It is said to have fled from fear, as if it had known we would not gently lay my hand on it; away it flew,

we followed it; then it alighted, then flew away again. As our resolution was to make a present of this fine bird to Ribkah, we continued following it, over hills and dales, till night came on; when the deceitful creature had at length brought us into a forest, out of all road, it at once vanished from our sight. All farther search after it became fruitless; and now we saw how wretchedly we were deluded, by a pleasure which at first seemed so innocent: for to find our way out of the forest, there were no hopes; so that, very much dejected and quite spent, we laid ourselves down by the side of a bush.

Here we fell a weeping, and pitying each other; when up came a son of violence, of the race of the giants, with pride and cruelty in his looks; a tyger's skin hung down from his shoulders. After viewing us some time, with a thundering voice he ordered us to follow him. We were obliged to comply; all our tears and entreaties were lost on him. Who he was, we knew not; but afterwards the angel who delivered us told us, he was a grandson of the famous Nimrod, his name Tidal, a forcerer, and dependent of the rebellious spirit Adramelech. In the desert contiguous to the southern borders of Haran, he has his strong hold, of vast extent, hewn by wonderful strength and art in a rocky mountain. His cruel delight is to steal children, and offer them in sacrifice to Adramelech. He in return taught him magic, so far as to make inferior spirits slaves to his commands. Such was the fine bird which had led us astray. And often they ensnare under the appearance of beautiful damsels, sweetly singing: thus alluring passengers to them; for his power is confined to the desert, where we fell into his lands. Various are his prestiges. Often he decoys travellers by a garden richly planted with the most sightly flowers, and trees of golden fruit, and fragrant arbours. Soft airs incline them to slumber in one of the arbours, which, on awaking, they find a thorny bush. He fiercely drove us before him into his castle. Its gates are iron, and all about them lay human bones: A sight which chilled our blood. We were in an agony of grief, despairing ever again to see our dear parents, whose tender cares of us were thus sadly disappointed. Here he dragged us into a vast hall of black marble, whither his brother soon came; his

brother

brother also in looks, shape, and temper : To whom he said ;

Here is this day's game, Gog. Did you ever see two prettier lads ? I think they rather exceed that blue eyed girl, which we sacrificed on the new moon : yet she seemed a daughter of love. See what a clear blood runs in these veins. I think I never saw two fitter for our purpose. This is a noble catch. To-morrow morning I'll offer them to my patron Adramelech. When the sweet odour of the sacrifice reaches him, he will think he can never make me sufficient returns.

Thus spoke he, whilst we stood embracing each other : weep we could not. The monster, so far from being moved, talked to us of mirth. What avails it, said he, to be thus whimpering against fate ? It now came into Abiasaph's mind, to try whether his melody could not awaken any humanity in Tidal ; and taking his lute, played the most moving airs which had ever come from it. It was as if the very strings mourned : my heart sunk into quiet. The place, before so horrible, had lost all its terror ; my blood again flowed smoothly, and my mind recovered its reflection. Tidal himself was moved ; and full of joy, coming up to the youth, said, You owe your life to your lute. After the sacrifice, I shall have a banquet, and you shall entertain the guests with your music. But your companion, and he is also the more likely of the two, shall be the victim of to-morrow morning's sacrifice. Here the kind Abiasaph threw himself at Tidal's feet, and with streams of tears thus supplicated for me :

O, my lord ! let my requests soften thee. If thou hadst a man for father, if thou didst suck a woman's breast, if thou art not utterly degenerated, O hear me ! I conjure thee, by thy father and mother, let the young man live. My life is wrapped up in his. Or, if thou art no man, no son of man, yet thou art God's creature, and owest obedience to him who reigns in heaven. Fear the God of thunder, and avoid doing any hurt to innocence. Yet if neither fear nor goodness can move thee, let this my last petition prevail with thee, if thou wilt not put me to death, and set this dear boy at liberty, keep me as thy slave at pleasure, and let him go. If he is put to death, be assured, that the most cruel tortures shall never make me put a finger to my lute. I

I interrupted him, and said to the giant : If you have any sense of the presence of a good God, let us return to our parents. But if one of us must bleed by your hands, let it be me. To see Abiasaph die would be worse than death.

Ye brain-sick fools, replied the inhuman monster, are you then so in love with death, as to strive for the precedence ? both shall die. Curse on this mean pusillanimity which began to soften me in behalf of a minstrel. No more your frantic requests. You shall both die, and bleed in honour of Satan.

Whilst he was thus storming, a brightness like the sun suddenly filled our dark prison. With joyful shudderings, I saw my angel Elhanan enter in celestial habiliments. Tidal trembling, sunk down to the ground. The seraph incensed, cursed him from the Lord ; and striking him with his iron sceptre, he fell down and rolled in the dust, maimed in every limb. The rocky castle suddenly fell into a heap of ruins ; and the infernal spirits, which here had acted in Tidal's spells, were ordered to their former place of torment. But the angel, with an affectionate kiss, composing our fluttering hearts, bore us on his extended wings to the grove of cedars, where the deceitful bird had appeared to us ; then blessing us, returned to heaven.

These and many more things Isaac continued relating, till in his narrative he renewed his affectionate parting from Nahor and Abiasaph, and of Milkah and Ribkah. The recollection awakened all his former sensations. These suppressed his speech, and covered his face with tears. Sarah kissed them dry, and with an eye of fondness hung on the youth's beautiful face. Then praised she the Lord of heaven, who, faithful to the promises with which he had honoured Abraham, had so signally protected Isaac, and already opened to him views of future felicity. Still the looks of the whole company were fixed on the darling boy ; still they listened : but Abraham was absorbed in amaze and deep pensiveness, when a servant hastily comes in, informing him that four camels with strangers were in the court ; a man of noble mein, apparently in the vigour of youth, and with him an aged person of benevolent aspect, with a boy in his arms ; and that slaves were unloading the sumpter-camels.

camels laden with choice products of Arabia, storax, and gums, and balsams. Abraham hastened out with Eliezer to receive the strangers, and invite them to liberal hospitality.

But how great his surprize and pleasure, when, in the stranger's lineaments, he knew Ishmael, his son by Hagar the Egyptian. Ishmael falling on the ground, embraced his father's knees, and begged his blessing. The father, embracing him, answered, Blessed be thou, my son, in whose face I see myself. The Lord bless thee. With joy I see in thy face traces of virtue. The smell of thy garments refreshes me as a fruitful field. Come, my dear son, come in, and let me hear what the Lord has done for Ishmael. But tell me first who is this comely child in this good old man's lap: it is your perfect resemblance. Ishmael taking the boy, taught him filial reverence, bowing him to his divine ancestor. Then, addressing himself to Abraham, O my father, bless him also; this is Nahajoth my first child, whom God gave to me in Paran. Some concerns calling me to Gilgahad, I brought the boy with me, that he might receive thy blessing. Allow, father, that he may remain with thee here, till I return from Guilghad. Abraham taking the child in his arms, kissed him; and with eyes darting cordial wishes to heaven, blessed him. His son now follows him into the tent, whilst Eliezer employed himself in providing for their entertainment, and in laying up Ishmael's presents.

Abraham introduced Ishmael and his lovely child to the family. In Isaac the sight of his brother kindled such a fervid joy that he ran in to his embraces, before he had saluted Sarah. As brothers born of one mother; like twins who had together hung at her breasts, after a long lamented separation, embrace each other with tears of joy and love, so embraced they each other. This generous affection strongly affected Sarah's tender heart. She also kissed Isaac's brother with maternal complacency, and admiring, viewed his face. But with more tender sentiments hastened she to kiss young Nabajoth, who as if in her he had his own caressing mother, with smiling face threw his little arms about her neck. Now seating themselves, Ishmael related to his father, how the Lord had been with him; how by an angel he had preserved him in the wilderness of Bersheba, when he

was

was near perishing ; how at first he had lived amidst the palm-trees of Paran, a hunter in the mazy wilderness. How afterwards he had married Basrath of Mizraim, a kinswoman of Hagar, with whom he brought away to Paran great wealth in camels, oxen, and sheep. How he had entered into a compact with the inhabitants of the hills of Paran. How they chose him leader of a band, to protect them against the robbers of the wildernesses of Sin and Sapher. And how in the fertile plains of Rimah he had built an altar to the God Shaddai : And lastly pitched his tents amidst a grove of fig-trees, as his settled abode.

Thus related he the ways of Abraham's God towards him : and the accomplishment of the promise given to his mother by an angel, when distressed in the wilderness. For was he not also Abraham's seed, whom the Lord had chosen to make himself known to the nations of the earth ? In familiar discourse they closed the evening. Yet an unusual gravity had insensibly spread over the patriarch's forehead ; and now was he constrained thus to damp their joy. Sarah, and ye my blessed sons, this day hath the Lord again given me two sons. Isaac, the son of his promise, and to him particularly consecrated ; him have I received from Haran ; the same in virtue, and improved in strength and stature. Thee, Ishmael, highly favoured by providence, the same day restores to me ; and more deserving my affection than when a vision signified to me, that Shaddai had appointed thee another dwelling place. But, however willingly my heart dilates itself to receive the sweet delight of spending this day with you in affectionate converse, yet is intent on a superior command. Know therefore, all, that this morning the Lord appeared to me in celestial glory, with orders that I should go with Isaac to Moriah, and there on a hill which he himself would shew, offer to him a well-pleasing sacrifice. Early to-morrow morning Isaac goes with me ; the will of the Lord is to be fulfilled, so haste becomes us, when God commands. The seraph, who continually beholds him, instantly follows his intimation, and irradiates the heavens in his obedient speed. Therefore, Sarah, feast thy motherly eye, whilst it is given thee, on thy dear son : and the time of absence let little Nebajoth shorten by like endearments.

He

He spoke ; and with serene countenance Sarah returned : Do as Jehovah has commanded thee. At his command the most tender wish of my heart is silent ; not a tear shall my eyes shed. This eye, which in seeing Isaac again has seen such shining marks of the divine goodness, shall not lament. Go, my son, thou art dear in the sight of the Eternal. The wings of Providence are spread over thee where-ever thou goest. O that I might follow thee ! Yet every motion of thy devout heart, every rapture of veneration, with which for the welfare of mankind thou liftest up thy suppliant arms, is also mine. Jehovah will hear me, though distant from thee. Go then, and return distinguished with new blessings. Thus spoke she, and with repeated kisses embraced the dear youth, whilst he remained long silent in mutual embraces, till in an ecstasy, he thus vented his glowing heart : What an honour is this command of God to me ! that he should chuse me to bring an offering of his own appointment ! If any conjecture be not too bold, something remarkable is at hand. Perhaps the heavens shall open and descend ; and I shall be so favoured, as to see the skirts of the Lord, and live. Perhaps, from his very mouth, or from one of his seraphs, I shall hear things to come ; or even be indulged with a sight of those golden times, which were the hopes of our forefathers. But whatever may lay concealed under the command, I am ready, father, to follow thee. At the first dawn of the day will I be in readiness. O that the blessed hour were now come !

Abraham, at these words sighed towards heaven. His pressures before Isaac's arrival were but faint images of those, with which his heart now laboured, on hearing the joyful conjectures and resolution of his pious son. Yet under these sufferings, his steady will remained placid, and thus in thoughts he addressed his God : My son is thine, O my Creature ; this sublime spirit, this heart inflamed with piety, are the gifts of thy grace. To thee it also belongs to let thy chosen continue on earth, a model to his generation ; or to take him to thee, into the choir of heavenly essences ; as anciently thou didst remove Enoch from the earth, that his eye might never more see any thing polluted. Is Isaac thus to be removed ! But, O Father, strengthen me, support my spirit ;

spirit, and forgive the pangs of my conflicting heart, if offensive to thee. Yet these, O Lord, shall be silent before thee.

Abraham's thoughts ascended up to Jehovah, and he appointed him his recompence. Then spoke he to Eloah, to Elhanan, and others who attend about the sanctuary :

Seraphs, ye who make the earth your more immediate care, preferably to other worlds, do you desire to see human virtue in more exalted dignity than hitherto it has been known ? Look towards Canaan ; there Abraham dwells ; ye know him. The holy simplicity of his walk ; his virtue, so near even to yours, has often given you delight. My eye itself, among all born of Adam, has seen one only who walked before me so intent on the destination for which I created man, Enoch alone, thy heavenly-minded favourite, Eloah. But the trial to which I now bring his virtue shall be honoured by mankind, and by their Creator. Sons, ye shall see it, and shall also honour Abraham. I have ordered him to sacrifice to me, with his own hand, the son of the promise, his Isaac. Never did father love a son more ; and the son is worthy of all his father's love. On his birth I smiled with distinguishing favours ; and his soul you saw, when Elhanan conducted it to earth. The heavenly host, Elhanan, congratulated thee on being appointed his angel. Him is his father to offer up to me ; and readily he obeys the trying command ; not a murmur defiles his lips ; he praises me under his distresses : but already have I settled on him suitable rewards. From Abraham's seed shall issue the blessing of the earth, even my Messiah ; and many sons of virtue, many holy generations shall call him Father, and inherit the patrimonial blessings. But thee, Elhanan, I again send to earth, to be a witness of his resigned piety. No motion of his heart is to escape thee ; no word, no look, expressive of the state of the soul. Be thou present to the final close, that the angels may from thee receive an account of this my worthy servant.

Now night, like a six-winged cherub, with its starry plumage, reigned over the umbered expanse, and to toil and care offered repose. Abraham had taken a repast with the persons of all others dearest to him, amidst conversation be-
coming

coming those whom angels had so often visited, becoming the chosen of the Lord, till a hymn of correspondent import concluded the devout colloquy. Isaac sang, accompanied by Timnah's melodious lute. He sang the pious man, who keeps his eye fixed on the Lord, whose sole scope is to live according to his dictates; who with an equal mind receives from his hands joy and grief; with grateful heart this day looks forward to views full of hope and felicity; to-morrow sees every hope blasted, and the prospect darkened; sees it sedate, knows that he who dwells in Olympus ever chuses the best for his; and evil, when sent by him, is good. Such was the theme of Isaac's song; the force of truth, the sweetness of his voice, and the modulations of the animated strings with sublime motions, extasied the audience. Abraham fell into a soothing absence; his musing soul in a scale of speculations ascended from truth to truth, till it brightened up, that every painful sentiment dissolved in the radiance of inspired wisdom. The song concludes. Yet still in Abraham's heart resounded the lenient harmony. He lay absorbed in thought, as in a slumber. Thus a seraph, after bringing God's commands to remote heavens, sinks wearied into sweet repose, amidst the soft strains of gratulating harps.

The family being retired to sleep, and Abraham and Sarah in the innermost part of the tent, the anxious mother asked the cause of that secret trouble which she had plainly observed in his countenance. Abraham answered: Thy question I cannot blame. Where we seek for joy, to see the appearances of grief, strikes the sensible heart; though sometimes of purest joys the vehicle is only as fleeting clouds, of short continuance. For how nigh is pain to pleasure? Joy has sighs, and melancholy, raptures. However, I shall impart to thee the thought, which mingled tears of sorrow with my tears of joy. When you so fondly embraced the boy, a gloomy thought came across me, and in the midst of sweet sensations shook me with strange terrors. I thought, what if a sudden stroke of fate should deprive thee of that dear child; and not seldom has the Lord visited even those whom he loved best with such afflictions. This was what troubled my imagination; but the impression soon passed over.

E

Thus

Thus spoke he ; and not contrary to truth were his words : Yet saw not the mother into this mystery. She replied, much moved :

My dear, how thou shockest me ! How could that thought enter into thy soul ! the most direful of all thoughts ! I tremble to hear it. Could I part from thee, Isaac ! how could I part with thee, my dear, my only son ? Alas ! to be deprived of the smiles of thine innocent eyes, and thine affectionate talk with which thou fewardest my fondness. Few then and most wretched would be my days. But why do I dwell upon such a dismal subject ? O, my honoured spouse, let not such a thought any more enter thy heart ; see brighter views offer themselves to us ; to us brilliant futurity opens a paradise of golden hopes : I was basking in them, till this dreadful furmise of thine, like a thunder-clap, disturbed them. Let us entertain better hopes, and hopes grounded on sovereign Providence, which gave him to us, has preserved him, and crowned him with promises, the remembrance of which is a continual fountain of joy to me. O the raptures which swell my heart, when I think on those hopes, which seem as it were beckoning to me, as near at hand, and the traces of which I plainly perceived in Isaac's account of his life at Haran. O, my dear child, I see thee already happy in a bride worthy of thee. God himself has for thee decked her with the lustre of the morning ; formed her entirely according to thy heart ; endued her with every virtuous disposition, and all perfection of faculty and beauty. She loves thee, and thou her. Methinks I see already round me a blooming troop of boys and girls, calling thee father, and whose looks shew thee so. They play about me. Delightful sight ! O happy son, and happy mother who bore thee, and suckled thee ! Under this lively hope, the years which retard the accomplishment of them will slide away like months. Yes, my dear spouse, if before these happy times my eyes should close, and never see the object of my child's love, nor lisping grandchildren ever call me mother, then will I entreat some angel to convey me hither, where invisible I may look down, and partake of your happiness.

Thus spoke the best of mothers. The father returned :
Justly

Justly from the origin of good may we expect good ; more than we wish will he do. The hope, O Sarah, which thy motherly heart embraces with such thankfulness and joy, is the most precious which God allows to mortals. Yet, oh guard thine heart, lest too much love to God's creatures insensibly stifle the thoughts of God : For often our thoughts are not as his. Enjoy the felicities of futurity ; yet enjoy them so as, at his will, serenely to relinquish them.

Thus Sarah and Abraham held edifying discourse, till sleep spread over them its balmy wings.

The End of CANTO II.

T H H

T H E
T R I A L of A B R A H A M.

C A N T O III.

ELHANAN, now by the divine order stationed near Abraham, and to whom Sarah, as his Isaac's mother, was particularly dear, and heard the conversation between the pious pair; and seeing her asleep amidst such gladdening ideas, thus thought within himself: Fast asleep! fond mother! amidst what pleasing hopes did sleep steal on thee! even in sleep they smile on thy amiable face! But alas! how soon will thy smiles be turned into mute grief! thy heart, now so calm, be shaken by a most desolating tempest! Thy distress will be as if cast down from heaven into an inhospitable wild! In the morning wilt thou cry, oh that night were come! thou drest the day's cheering light. Behold night comes, and it avails thee not! Wretched Sarah! thy thoughts, and hence all thy woe, are not the thoughts of God; no, not of angels! They with rejoicing humility adore the thoughts of the Deity. The complaint or wailing of a spirit is to us, as if the harmonious spheres should burst into jarring dissonance. Yet, oh tender mother, every throw of thine goes to my heart! Thou wast created sensible; tender is thy soul, full of goodness and purity; would it had equal strength to encounter affliction, and conform its movements to the divine dispensations! To see thee thus smiling with delusive ideas, fills me with dejection, and draws the pitying tear to my eye. But on a sudden, serenity scatters these dismal thoughts; radiant views insensibly open, and shed a brightness on the mournful event! O Isaac, long before I could hope for such a pleasure, I shall embrace thee in the state of beauty; early art thou ripened for heaven! Open ye heavens, shine brighter ye lucent bowers, where soon he is to join our choir in praising the Sovereign of heaven and earth; ye ethereal clouds, cherish with genial moisture that flowery field whither I shall lead him to the first embraces

embraces of the rejoicing seraphs, there cause fairest spring to bloom. Could I hope so soon to call my precious ward my brother, when, unconscious, thou followedest me to dwell in a fleshly body. When Sarah first gave thee her motherly kisses, even then a joyful prospect extended itself; thy earthly life promised me, as spectator and guardian of it, delights compensating my absence from heaven. Virtue in mortals gladdens the inhabitants of Olympus: yes, sweet is it on saddened cheeks, and in eyes of love, to see the glittering tears, tears of rapture, when the whole force of latent tenderness breaks forth; sweet it is to hear the fondling babe, in the mother's lap, lisping the names felt in the heart long before utterance. Sweet is it to see a father's dimmed eye sparkle in viewing a numerous train of heirs to his blessings, and by his example inured to virtue. These were objects of complacency to me; but now Isaac is a source of higher joys! O ravishing approach of thy consummate felicity! Yes, dear youth, thou exchangeest thy earthly life for the vision of God; for Eloah's hymns, life eternal, and early perfection. Blessed youth, now the sight of thy streaming blood will not draw a tear from me; no, when thy lovely head shall droop like the withering lilly, so far from bewailing thy death as premature, I shall embrace thy soul, and with my strongest flight, soar with it exulting to the angelic choir.

Having thus spoke, to Isaac's couch returning, solaceful dreams he shed around the sleeping youth. Now day broke, and Abraham, awaked by the afflux of the purple dawn, arose, and with sad complacency, on his coming into the hall, found Isaac already girded, and the travelling-staff in his hand. Attention to the divine command had interrupted a celestial dream: he saw bands of seraphs in the opened heavens hovering round the clouds which shroud the Deity's august sanctuary, their azure wings emitting ambrosial fragrance. From visions awakened to rapture, he leaped from his couch, eager to equip himself for the journey, which, through the typical dream, promised him heavenly apparitions. With fervid joy he tells his father the dream, urging him to haste. Ishmael and Eliezer delayed not to pay their parting salutation. But how differently did the separation affect

affect them ! Ishmael was inclined that the fatigued camels should rest that day, then proceed, and from Gilead's misty hills bring to Mizraim labdanum and nardus, and the precious tears of myrrh : he also intimated his strong desire, after their return, to spend some social days with such beloved company, then hasten to his affectionate Basmath. In the mean time, Sarah had loaded an ass and two slaves with provisions for seven days ; and all things wait the departure. Abraham with tender wishes loosens himself from Sarah's close embraces, then cordially embraced the son of Hagar. And scarce could good Eliezer withdraw his arms from Isaac, till he dropped them, over-powered by sorrow. A stream of tears gathering in his swollen eyes, he turned aside from the dear youth. Isaac, with brotherly cordiality, throwing himself into Ishmael's arms, saw not his disordered visage. But now, gentle Isaac, a person still more beloved claims thy endearments, thy tenderest kisses, Sarah, thy respected mother, hastens to detain thee with her parting embraces. She wept not ; with countenance of placid joy she blessed him, and blessed him with composed affection : conceiving his journey was the appointed means for receiving supernal favours from the most High, grief had been criminal : her son also, flushed with the like expectation, hung extasied on her glowing cheek. Thus the noble-minded Serena parted from her beloved Diocles, when going to his remote parents ; her eyes, though tearless, shewed love inexpressible ; with firm speech she sent her good wishes to his Sipa, nor forgot the courteous Daphne ; then silent looks up to heaven, then again, with calm regret, takes a second parting look of Diocles, whose affection, animated by the magnanimity of its dear object, disdained to vent its grief. The most tender of mothers beheld such decorum with joy, and to fondness dedicated only one tear. After a long embrace, Sarah thus expressed herself : Go then, my dear son, whether our God Shaddai has appointed thee ; it joys me to see thine eyes sparkle with glorious hopes, and thy pious impatience to hear the real voice of God speaking in person to thee. Thou wast born by his promise. Go then, and return highly favoured by him.

He speeded as the roe leaping on the mountains ; already
tufsted

traced Mamre vanishes from their sight. In vain the family with eager looks seeks them amidst the azure vapours of the distant hills.

With the travellers Elhanan winged his way, invisible, as the appointed witness of this singular transaction, and attentively observed the patriarch's looks.

Thou, under whose auspices I have attempted the pious song, O sacred muse, to whom the thoughts of men and angels are revealed, who hearest the softest stirrings within the concealing breast, incline thy ear to me ! propitious impart what Elhanan read in Abraham's visage, what his sensations, what thoughts agitated his soul, when in abstractive pensiveness, he regarded neither the chearing progress of the sunny day, the varying richness of the extensive prospects, nor even his beloved Isaac, who in rapturous hymns adored the creator of all he saw.

I am then a going to thee, thou land of vision ; it is to Moriah I am thus hastening, and to distain it with the innocent blood of my only son ; and by this hand he is to bleed ! Ye hills, and ye surmounting cedars, an only and beloved son shall ye see fall under a father's hands. Such is Shaddai's command. He has selected him for a sacrifice ! Will then the dear child's harmless blood delight him ! Oh my withered glory ! Sad extinction of such heavenly hopes ! Alas ! sweet lamb, thou singest blyth, thou knowest not thy fate. Thy blooming face still smiles like this valley ; still in thee circulate the springs of life, like flowing brooks, like streams in the garden of the Lord. But how soon is all this to pass away ! Soon will thy beautiful face be disfigured by the agonies of death, thy body lie shivering, pale, and bloody. Methinks the dreadful spot is before me ; my dear Isaac bleeds ; I see the last throb of his convulsed breast. Oh his languid eyes still show affectionate resignation ! oh thou fairest flower ! Nature appalled, is every-where silent. Moriah, thou quakest under me ; Zion, the deed affrights thee, to more pleasing sights accustomed ; for amidst thine umbrageous cedars Noah oft poured forth his fervent oraisons, oft have Deborah's hymns consecrated thy summits ; and thy rosy Sharon is the cheerful resort of the neighbouring youth. But now the lugubrious moans of death will be heard,

heard, and the blood of an only son shed by his own father will defile thy sides. Ah how my blood chills ! how my heart recoils ! Silence, nature. My will is dedicated to God. Withhold me not from swift obedience to his command. A dark veil indeed is drawn over my fate ; a thicker gloom encompasses me, than when, in obscure imagery, terrified I saw the remote transactions of my progeny ; when in the night the terrors of the Lord came on me, and he uttered his voice in thunder. Lord, unfathomable art thou in thy judgments ! lofty and dark are thy ways ! a sacred obscurity, to human eye impervious, covers thy decrees. But oh ! a beam suddenly breaks in on my distressed soul, and disperses the gloom. Is it illusion ! or is the thought which now rises in me from God ! is it not to throw a light on my dark destiny ? Why, visit totally unexpected, comes my first son, by unhappy Hagar, on the very day when God demands Isaac of me ! By what mazy ways has the Lord brought him hither, as for some mysterious view ! Can it be Nabajoth to whom the promise is assigned ! Was it only to try my faith, that for a few years he bestowed on me such a child as Isaac, in every excellence so complete ! Is it in Ishmael's seed that the nations are to be blessed ! God of my fathers, thy will be done. Welcome, thou blessed of the Lord ; as he is pleased to take Isaac to himself, thou shalt be my Isaac. Yet this may be but a vain imagination. Forgive, O Lord, forgive the presumptuous conjecture which approaches thy secret ; trembling it recedes. Let not man with bold enquiry profane thy counsels ! there let cherubs veil ! Whatever be the divine decree, the promise thou didst deign to give me standeth sure. The heavens may pass away, but the word of the Lord abideth. Sooner shall the ashes of my son's consumed corse, impregnated by thy breath, bring forth a youth ; sooner shall the animated stones become men, than the word of thy glorious promise fail.

Such were the patriarch's thoughts ; and now he turned his pitying looks to Isaac, who answering them with a smile, said : Father, the country now before us brings to my mind a beautiful spot, where Ribkah taught me a hymn ; if you please, you shall hear it. This fine weather and pleasant country, with the singing of the birds, reminds me of many
delightful

delightful hours I passed in the fields, with that beautiful damsel, and my dear Abiasaph.

Abraham smiled assent; and thus the pleased youth began:

Joy, delight of God and man, associate of innocence, from yonder sunny hill, or from this flowery vale, where enamoured spring embraces thee, come and aid my song; quit the field of lillies and the spicy grove. Who is this issuing from the spicy grove, fair as the silver moon, stately as the cedar? Is she a seraph, one of the celestial youth, of fresh creation? Her eye gently darts love into the charmed breast! she can be no other than a seraph! Or is thy name Joy? O happy, beyond all words happy they who bask in thy beams! Yes, it is she; at my request she comes. See how ambrosial flowers shoot thick up under her steps, and with fragrance and varied lustre announce her coming on. Hail, sister of the spring! the smiling hours with rosy chaplets attend thee, all beautiful, and of the same birth all! O Joy, spread thy enrapturing wings, and bear me to the empyreal regions! I lose sight of terrestrial scenes. O Creator, elevated by sacred joy, I approach thy throne, to sing thy praise. Nature joins in my hymns to thee, from the waving grove melody ascends, and to thee the odorous vales breathe incense. Second my song, ye offspring of creation, chaunt Almighty Love, the source of our being. Ye seraphs, ye hosts of heaven, resound his praise; and ye limpid streams, which meandering wind along roseate margins, warble his praise through all your course, carry it to the mighty waves; let every thing that lives in air, sea, and land, praise the Lord, and rejoice in his goodness.

Thus sang he; and to the lay succeeded discourse of high concernment, shortening the way. Two days and nights had passed, and the third morning was now advancing from the chambers of the east, when the divine Abraham, lifting up his eyes, in the grey distance perceived a mountain supereminent in height; this was Moriah. The patriarch knew the country. The preceding night he had a vision of celestial essence, saying to him: In token of the hill where God requires thy sacrifice, a dove shall meet thee from Sharon; follow it till thou seest it alight on one of the hills; there is Isaac to be offered. The shining guide now appears

in view, its flight directed towards them. The youth first descried it, and rejoiced, immediately concluding it to be of the breed of that auspicious dove, which, as ancient song records, met Shem at Sion. The patriarch saw it, and the sight pierced his heart ; but, as enjoined, he followed it towards Moriah. The patriarch halting at the foot of the hill, ordered his servants there to wait his return. Then laying the wood for the burnt-offering on Isaac's shoulders, and taking the knife and fire, he ascended the hill, his son alone accompanying him, and the dove leading the way. The youth's heart dilates with heavenly ideas, a silent awe impresses him, a devout blush overspreads his fixed countenance, as if under a sense of the near approach of God.

Having reached the summit, he said to Abraham : Father, we are on the mount where God has appointed the sacrifice, yonder I see the dove alighted ; but where is the lamb we are to offer ?

These innocent words were another poiniard in the father's heart ; and, with looks of fore conflict, he thus answered : The God Shaddai, my dear, will provide a lamb. Here grief stopped his speech. The youth also forbore farther enquiry ; both silent ascend the long acclivity of the sacred hill ; to this summit of its latter ages have given the name of Golgotha. Here, thou Messiah, incarnate God, be astonished ye heavens, and humble thyself, O earth ! didst bleed for mankind. Both having reverentially prostrated themselves, Abraham raised an altar of the verdant sod, and having placed the wood on it, thus spoke to his wondering son.

Now, son, hear what lamb God hath chosen : tremble not, my dear---Jehovah has ordered, and he is Lord over all, he has ordered me, to sacrifice---thee---thee---to him---thee, mine only son, by thy mother---there is no gain-saying his command, though with a bleeding heart I execute it.---God gave thee to me ; to him thou belongest, he now takes thee away---but it is for thy happiness.---Weep not, my child ; rather rejoice that the most High chuses thy blood preferable to that of the lambs in the vale, to be a type of the Redeemer. Look up, behold the gates of heaven open to receive thee ; seraphs wreath chaplets for thee ; there shalt thou see God, and live. This thou didst ardent-ly

ly wish ; and in much greater glory shalt thou see him, than mortal eye can bear, even face to face ! Surely such hopes, so superior to whatever the earth displays, should suppress all tears.---With becoming willingness resign thy life to the Creator---he removes thee to one infinitely better, to the state of his elect.

Whilst Abraham was thus speaking, the youth, with child-like warmth, threw his arms about him, and a few tears dropped on his father's pallid cheeks, as stooping he held him in his embraces. This sight affected Elhanan, his emotions dimmed his celestial mein. As a soft damsel, on a visit to a favourite companion, a thousand pleasing ideas dancing in her gay imagination, with step alert enters the room, when, instead of being met with open arms, she sees the worthy object of her tenderness languishing under sickness, and faintly hold out to her a withered hand, at once the sympathizing maid stands bereft of every charm, deadened is the sparkle of her eye, the bloom of her cheek suddenly fades ; nor less was the seraph's beauty overcast. And now he hears Isaac thus sedately address the admonishing patriarch : The tears, my father, which thou sawest me shed, are not involuntary tears ; and much less proceed they from fear. The eye shews the heart : view me, and be that the token of my obedience. I did, indeed, hope for a longer life on this earth, to be the support and joy of your declining years, and to sooth the last hours of the best of mothers. Hopes of great delight presented themselves to me, so that, at the very thought of them, tears have burst forth---yet willingly, O father, forego I every joy for that which God has appointed for me : but my mother---that thought harrows my soul---I weep for her---how will her tenderness bear my unexpected death ? O divine Messiah, through whom my blood will be a grateful offering to the Deity, strengthen her ; assuage her distress with heavenly solacements. I trust he will comfort her, and you also, my father. And now away all sorrow, tears, and sighs ; no earthly regret swells my heart ; it is devoted to God. Here I am father ; the offering is willing to bleed ; do unto me as God has ordered---O elevating thought ! O thought of sweetness inexpressible ! to behold the Deity, to contemplate him

him, in adoring prostrations before his throne, and live ! What a tranquility dost thou impart ! My soul is now all light and triumph ! ---No hopes, no lamenting friends, nor dearest Ribkah, nor thy tears or wringing hands, thou best of mothers, could disturb this heavenly calm, could draw from me one wish of continuing in an earthly life, the least inclination to turn my back on those glorious views opening before me. Father and mother, relations and associates, lament not for me ; or if natural love forces your tears for my untimely death, rejoice also at my felicity.

The raptured seraph, at these words, recovered all his native beauty, and moved forward in wide effulgence, preparing to receive the dislodged soul, and convey it to that bliss, the sure expectation of which sustained it in this trial, to nature so big with terror. Abraham once more kissed Isaac, dropping only one tear on his blooming cheek, which no tear of his now wetted ; yet hove their convulsed hearts with sensations, by few felt, and by these not to be described.

Isaac now composedly placed himself on the wood, as a nearer approach to the fruition of his hopes. Abraham, with worshipping eye, thus addressed his God : Lord, I am now ready ; my heart has girded itself with iron ; it sighs no more ; reluctant nature is silent ; behold, every faculty, passion, and power in me, are all obedience to thy sacred will. I give up thy best gift ; the comfort, the delight of my life, the stay of my sanctity, I lay at thy feet ; with my own hand I sacrifice my all to thee ! O splendid ideas ! let my mind have one fleeting libation of your delights, irradiate it with one momentary ray, before ye leave me for ever. For ever ; for soon, instead of that joy which in the morning gladdened my waking mind, and often mingled with my nightly dreams, my portion will be settled affliction. Soon will Mamre, where, my dear Isaac, thy sweet voice so often charmed me, soon will its oaks, where the Messiah himself promised thy birth, instead of hymns hear only lamentations ; for all who knew thee will bewail thee. How was my heart moved within me, at thy endearing accents when thou called me father ! but that sweet sound never more shall I hear---I shall no more hear Isaac's sweet voice. Thou, O God, gavest him to me, and even now seest how I delight-
ed

ed in him. Very gracious art thou to man, and in a happy hour on the tables of destiny hast thou written his life : The angels rejoiced at his nativity, and mortals to their offspring with the fate of him, who sees his son growing up in every virtue. But, O Creator, Isaac hast thou eminently distinguished ; so refined a soul ! such superior faculties ! such heavenly temper ! such piety ! such early wisdom ! and this peerless youth was mine ; I brought him up ; he called me father. Behold him and all his virtues crowned in this resignation---by my hand is he to die ; but, O sovereign Creator, I complain not---shall I dare to complain of thee ?---rather thanksgivings become my lips ! Yes, my soul, O bounteous God, shall thank thee for such a child, and his life so long preserved ! Blessed be thou, Father of mercies, for each day of his precious life, for every rupture, when in him, with anticipating ideas, I saw the future Redeemer, the Saviour of my fallen progeny. O Creator, these praises I offer for thy goodness ; and do thou propitious accept the sacrifice from my obedient hand.

Thus spake the magnanimous patriarch, and, turning his eyes on his resigned son, took up the sacrificial knife.

Now the eternal Father looked down on earth, and seeing the probatory sacrifice so near execution, he said to the angels, who watch around the sanctuary : Abraham has stood the severe trial ; in obedience to me, he would not have spared his own son. Behold him ready with the sacrificing instruments. Whom among you shall I send, to withhold his arm, and carry him a renewal of my benediction.

Eloah stepping forth, prostrated himself at the throne : be it me. Jehovah, my heart overflows with joy, that thou restorest the son to the father ; and his obedience thus richly recompenseth ! O with what ecstatic amazement will he listen to the glad tidings ! O, thou Creator of all things, since man came from thy forming hands ; since I saw the first human pair tread thy paradise in the beauty of the divine image, never has such a benevolent joy for man so warmed my heart. O permit me to shoot to the earth, and to thy tried servant announce the word of life, which stands manifest in thy benign aspect.

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He spake : and in the Deity's visage reading his purport, the seraph instantly, with flight a thousand times swifter than the whirl of the extreme spheres round the heaven of heavens, swift as the thoughts of cherubs, darted towards the earth. He had reached it, when Abraham stood as intranced, in a posture for slaying his son, who bowed on the altar. Time to seraphs is not as to us ; the interval which to man slides away unperceived, they fill up with grand achievements. Such was the seraph's instantaneous descent. Over the patriarch stood God's resplendent messenger, whose celestial effulgence diffused an ample glory round him ; and now from the irradiated air he called :

Abraham, Abraham ! The patriarch raised his head, and seeing the heavenly form, started, and from his trembling hand dropped the knife : but soon Eloah's benign looks removed the tumultuous impressions of his majesty, and inspired elevating hopes : for Abraham having prostrated himself in religious awe, Eloah thus called to him : Rise, thou blessed of the Lord, never didst thou from heaven receive a more welcome message : God has tried thine obedience, and thou hast proved it sincere : in submission to his command, thou wouldst not have spared a beloved son ; of this thy devotedness to the divine will, that son is now the reward, embrace him. Isaac, arise ; come from the altar, and embrace thy father : praise God in effusions of joy, of love.

The patriarch, rising, with extended arms, and streaming eyes, heavenwards, wept gratitude and transport ; his emotions precluded speech ; his paternal heart was too narrow for the impetuous flush ; yet shone his countenance with heavenly joys. As a martyr, stedfast to sacred truth, lingers under tortures, the relief of immediate death being denied, till at length his vital powers exhausted, his languorous eyes close in the final sleep, and the disencumbered soul at once sees itself released, at once, amidst the gratulatory peans of exulting angels, that inebriated with the blissful change, with the commencement of beatitude, she speechless sinks on the bosom of the raptured seraph who attended her on earth. Little less transported was the affectionate father, when beyond all his hopes, and with such
august

august circumstances, and, as it were, from the shadow of death, his dear Isaac was restored to him. With redoubled fondness he embraces the youth, who, lost in beholding the angel, observed not his father; exalted ideas dilate his raptured soul, and kneeling respectful, yet with steady eye, he viewed the radiant essence; the beautiful Ethanan he also saw hanging over him with looks of applause; soon he becomes sensible of his father's fondness, and, as conscious of breach of duty, delayed not the most impassioned returns, falls at his feet, rises, and throwing his arms about him, kisses away the tears from the patriarch's venerable cheeks; then his ecstacy gradually subsiding, thus vented itself: Oh, father, from what ecstacy am I again fallen to earth! a change scarce supportable, did it not restore me to the embraces and heavenly discourse of parents whom I can never sufficiently honour? Already on angels wings I was soaring in the regions of light, in near approach to the Deity. This angel, so glorious, who has notified the Lords gracious pleasure concerning us, is but one of the innumerable choirs, in whose blessed society I was entering on an endless eternity. As I lay on the altar, at the first gleam, which indicated the seraph's approach, O father, I rejoiced in assured hope, that the celestial spirits were come to conduct my soul to their residence; on his nearer approach, I imagined even to hear the sound of that chariot in which our pious forefather Enoch was taken up to heaven. My heart, I can attest it, leaped for joy: But my heart deceived me, and God has determined otherwise. I see myself again in the flesh; yet, which greatly alleviates my concern, in thy embraces. Being yet not ripe for heaven, I must remain in this preparatory life, with constant devotion and piety, the better to be fitted for that of futurity. Hail, my much honoured father, to whom I am thus miraculously restored! thou earth also, hail! willingly from heaven do I return to thee, as the God of heaven has ordained: In all things concerning me, his sacred will be done.

Thus spoke the youth, now wholly intent on his father, who thus addressed Eloah: Divine messenger, thou highest among Jehovah's ministers! not sweeter sound the harps of angels, preludes of bliss, to the expiring just, than thy tid-
ings

ings to me ! Oh, it darts new spirit through my whole frame ! never did I feel the life of the soul in such power ! never did my inward parts dissolve in such melting raptures ! O God Shaddai, how shall I thank thy loving kindness ! Can dust thank the Sovereign of the cherubs ! What can I, but to my kindred and strangers, unwearied, make known thy mighty acts ! Thy judgments are a great deep ; let the silence of an affected heart praise thee ; unutterable are thy glories ; rich art thou in mercies. O Jehovah, mighty and gracious hast thou shewn thyself to the children of Adam ! the proud thou strikest down to the dust, and the humble thou crownest with praise and honour. Thou makest the afflicted to shout for joy ; thou settest the captive free. Thou makest the aged a mother of children ; thou restorest that which was lost ! I am now a second time a father ; and sweeter is the name to my ears, than when Isaac first lisped it. O blessed day ! of all others thou shalt be to me the chief festival. No such happiness did thy morning promise me ; thou art the first of that happy life of my renewed youth, which this divine event presages. O golden day, sanctified be thou above all days ; be every anniversary of thee signalized by some beneficent wonder ; may smiling hours usher thee in ; may the sun heighten thy lustre with its brightest rays. On thee may a happy mother, before mourning her sterility, bring forth two comely boys, whose virile years shall increase her joy by valorous deeds ! on thee may the adventurous hero bring back the outrageous enemy's spoils : To the youth deliver the bride undefil'd ; to fathers, sons. On thee may the voice of joy ring throughout the festive earth. Hail also Moriah ! where God has so wonderfully shewn his mercy to me ! stand thou a perpetual monument of his goodness ; from thee may the exuberance of God, like dew, descend on blooming Sharon ; in remotest futurity shall angels resort under thy umbrageous cedars, and sometimes the divine presence hover over thee, as brooded the creative spirit over the primeval chaos.

Abraham, having thus spoken, gazing around the awful spot, perceived a young ram with his horns entangled in a bush. Pleased that he should not depart without an act of formal worship, he hastens, and drags the reluctant creature
to

to the altar. Whilst with the smoke of the burnt-offering, ascended the sacrificer's grateful praises, Elhanan, with reverential affection, thus bespoke the sublime Eloah :

Divine seraph, how I venerate thy benevolence to man, for his sake to come down from before the throne ! Never, no not when thou wast among the angelic choir, have I seen thy face beam a more graceful smile, than at these affectionate embraces of such a son and father. That they are not unworthy of thy regard, is well known to thee. Intuition is thy superior endowment ; a look makes known to thee more than a succession of time gradually unfolds to me. Am I not happy in being Isaac's guardian ! how beautiful is human virtue in such a form ; how amiable the serenity of innocence ! My love of the youth deceives me, or Eloah has in charge fresh blessings for him, which will be fresh joys to me.

Eloah thus answered : Kindly seraph, what thou hopest the wing of time is already bringing on Isaac, so has the Lord written in the books of fate, shall to his descendants be the model of human happiness. Hadst not thou seen in Haran's plains a damsel comparatively to others as a rose among the thorns ; and well-principled as beautiful, of softest manners and elevated faculties : This peerless damsel is destined for thy ward ; then behold the felicity of connubial love, founded on harmony of virtuous sentiments, complacent, decent, and permanent. Thus shall they form each other's joy. Farther, Jehovah himself will visit his dwelling ; and the youth of heaven delight in those mansions where the praises of the Lord resound from pure lips.

Thus held the blessed spirits discourse ; and when the fume of the consumed victim ceased to ascend, Eloah, with auspicious voice, again called to Abraham :

Abraham, hear the word of the Lord : Thus saith Jehovah, who in his right hand holdeth the heavens, and in his left the worlds which move by his breath : By myself I swear to thee, thy sanctity being so pleasing in my sight, so pure from the common ways of men, and so unreserved thy obedience, that, at my command, thou wouldst have slain thy beloved son : behold thy race shall be great and honourable before me, above all the generations of the earth ; innumerable

merable as the stars of the heavens, or the sands of the sea ; it shall possess the gates of its enemies ; it shall be called the chosen of the Lord. Yes, from thy seed shall salvation be derived to all the nations of the earth. Thus declares the God of destiny, whose promise stands immoveable as the mountain of the Lord. But can I hide from Abraham the good which my sovereign has appointed for him : No, I will impart to him what I have seen of futurity. Observe then, thou blessed of Jehovah, his wonderful dealings towards thee. Seven times was I permitted to look into God's sanctuary ; there on adamantine columns hang the golden tables of divine decrees ; and among many other events I read, that out of thy posterity shall arise a King, surpassing all the monarchs of the east in wisdom and magnificence ; he on this mount shall erect a stately temple to Jehovah ; in it the glory of God shall reside, visible to man, till the Messiah come ; then shall all types be done away. On this consecrated mount, where God had ordered thee to sacrifice Isaac, the Mediator shall give himself as a piacular oblation for lapsed Adam's race ; here shall the earth drink in his redeeming blood. Then rent shall be the veil which separateth God from men ; then the whole earth becomes no less consecrated than this hill ; God is reconciled to all ; alike present to all ; and all worshipping him in spirit and truth will he hear. Behold this is the branch from thy root, the present hope of the righteous, and in whom all the ends of the earth will one day bless themselves : through him whom, from the foundation of the world, Jehovah chose as restorer of the earth ; through him the Messiah shall the earth be renewed in its primeval beauty : truth and peace shall descend from heaven ; the desert shall blossom as the rose ; to the sandy waste shall be given the glory of Lebanon, and the excellency of luxurious Sharon ; streams of honey shall he burst from the rock, and fountains refresh the parched wilderness. To Sion God's elect shall resort in jubilant troops ; with endless joy and divine triumph shall they be filled ; the voice of grief and pain shall no more be heard. Then rejoice, ye heavens, and leap for joy, thou earth ; shine forth, pre-eminent above other stars, for the Lord Jehovah is thy redeemer. What I have

I have now imparted to thee, Abraham, these eyes saw in the books of irreversible futurity. Hail favourite of heaven ! hail respectable ancestor of the Messiah ! of man's salvation incarnate ! thine are the promises of God ; thou dwellest under the shadow of the most High : angels cannot wish thee more.

The patriarch prostrate, melting with reverence and joy, heard Eloah's prophetic relation : close to him lay Isaac, rejoicing in his father's honour, and the redemption of his descendants. Now Eloah raised himself heaven-wards ; on spreading his resplendent plumage, an air of fragrance filled the whole air. Already has he passed the sun : Elhanan followed with rapid joy, and at every star on which his effulgence beamed, the expanse rang with the melody of congratulating angels.

Whilst the patriarch remained, with his son, on Moriah, an ambrosial gale, effect of the celestial appearance, rustled among the leaves : Of God's unsearchable ways, of his greatness, which passeth all knowledge, of his superabundant goodness, and of their homage and duties, they conversed. Then hastening down the mountain, they returned to their attendants, whom also the enlivening odours, emanating from the celestial essence, had filled with new joys ; all elate in spirit, set out on their return to Mamre, and the way seemed to vanish under their feet.

The End of C A N T O III.

T H E

T H E

T R I A L of A B R A H A M.

C A N T O IV.

IN the mean time Abraham's house was not without events well worthy of record. The muse, who presides over my song, saw those events. What she, propitious to my request, has in instructive visions communicated to me, that I, conformably to her behest, again relate, that he who reads may admire the divine ways.

On the evening of that day when Abraham began his journey, Hagar's son was roving thro' Mamre's fruitful fields, scenes fitted for his sportive years; and, indulging the most pleasing reflections, entered the oaken grove. Here a lugubrious sound startles him, like the sobbing voice of bewailing distress; he listens, strongly affected, and more as he drew near, thinking within himself, who can this be, that with heart-piercing lamentations disturbs the happy place, where the noble-minded Abraham's unbounded liberality diffuses contentment and cheerfulness! Are repining murmurs to be heard, where heaven's distinguished favourite protects and cherishes all with heavenly goodness, where traces of the empyrean Sovereign's appearance are ever seen! By the modulation, it is the plaintive voice of unhappy love!--It may be of some sorrowful father, for the untimely death of an only and hopeful son! or of a bride for her spouse, torn from her arms by the sudden outrages of robbers, his doom harsh servitude in some distant land!--Whoever it be, it becomes me to give what assistance I can; the prosperity with which my life is crowned, is not to exclude compassion for the afflicted. With soft tread drawing near, within a close arbour he discovered the person from whom these moanings came: This was the steward Eliezer, who had formerly shewn him a very tender affection. As when a traveller entering a track where nature displays a profusion of rural beauties, charmed with the splendid view,
and

and heedless of his steps, treads on an adder lurking amidst the herbage, the irritated reptile twines round his leg ; he stands aghast ; the flowery scenes no longer attract his eye ; and all he now sees is the adder menacing with its forked tongue : thus stood Ishmael, chilled with grateful sympathy, no longer regarding Mamre's uberous fields, scenes of his sportive years, no longer indulged pleasing recollections. Too well he knew this hoary friend, who wringing his hands, was abandoning himself to the extremity of grief. Not long he stayed, before his heart prompted him to go in, and offer what relief was in his power. He enters, and with courteous mein taking Eliezer by his trembling hand, thus enquired into the cause of such effuse affliction. Father, what can have driven you from the chearful family to this lonely place, and hear to mourn thus ! I can scarce believe it is you, from whom the delorous sounds came which drew me hither ! surely it must be some dreadful woe ! In these happy tents, on which so manifestly rests the singular benediction of heaven, I conceived only joy to dwell. Let me entreat you, by all your former affection, disburden your heart to me, and, at the same time, ease mine of a torturing anxiety ; for this grief of your's certainly relates to the family. Eliezer answered : Grudge me not the slender comfort of the afflicted, to vent their mournings in retirement : after this morning all the remainder of my life will be given up to sorrow. Dear youth, leave me, I pray thee, that, whilst it can be so, I may be the only mourner in this worthy family. Enquire no farther : once more I request thee to withdraw ; for thy compassion does not in the least abate my affliction.

Ishmael, still more struck with these words, again requested to know the cause of his affliction, and urged his instances with such earnestness, that the good Eliezer yielded to his importunity, and related to him the divine apparition, God's command, and the purpose of Abraham's journey. Overcome as with the terrors of God, Ishmael threw himself on the ground, where he remained without speech, and his eyes denied him these assuaging tears, which wetted Eliezer's withered cheeks. Such was his love to his brother. At length the tears burst forth ; he joins in all Eliezer's lamentations

mentations ; his manly spirit is born down by anguish ; and it was not till emotions had spent themselves, that he thus spoke to his fellow mourner :

Eliezer, were it ever lawful to give way to grief, it would be for Isaac's death : thou lovest in him the staff of thy declining age ; and I an only brother, so knit to me, and whose heavenly temper I venerate no less than I love his person. Such is our loss, if what thou fearest be decreed in heaven : but I am not without hopes : and, indeed, without these hopes, I should sin against Providence, which even unworthy I have so often experienced. My friend, I trust that all God's thoughts toward the house of Abraham, are thoughts of goodness ; long yet shall Isaac praise him in the land of the living. We often think ourselves in a maze of distress, without any issue ; darkness surrounds us, the shadows of death take hold of us ; and the Lord suddenly makes the darkness light, and the maze a straight open way. Thus have I often found him in my hazardous life. Knewest thou how he has guided, has preserved me, thou would not hesitate to believe, that with still more tender care will he preserve the son of his promise. Would it be any alleviation to thine oppressed heart, for me to relate some passages of my life, marked with particular tokens of the divine protection ?

At these kind words, the old man smoothed his brow, entreated him to encourage his faith by such relation ; and Ishmael, not less willing to gratify him, thus began :

When my father, by divine command, intimated in a dream, dismissed my mother Hagar, she took her way, leading me by the hand, into the desert of Beersheba, often with tears looking back to the cots, where she had lived so comfortably : and now nothing but distress was before her ; an inhospitable land, and she an alien. Oft, sighing, would she cast a tearful eye on me, and in transports of tenderness implore heaven's care. On the evening of the second day, our water failed us, and the desert afforded neither well, spring, nor cistern ; in vain we listened for some fall of water, from the cleft rock : imagine our despair. On the fourth morning, my thirst became tormenting ; yet, not to increase my mother's sore affliction, I bore it in silence, and with much pain dragged myself along,
hanging

hanging at her arm ; till spent with anguish, and the heat of the noon-day sun, I fell down under a blighted fig-tree, and by me sat down my mother : here I lay with arid mouth and parched entrails, my languid head resting on her bosom. At length, poor woman, unable to bear the sight, she started up, with a kind of wildness, and retiring to some distance, gave herself up to all the transports of a mother's grief. How nigh was I apparently to death ! where then was the angel's cheering promise, given to my destitute mother, that I should be the father of a mighty people ! Yet the Lord delivered me, and confirmed the truth of his words. An angel appeared, even the same which had happened to us in Sur. I felt relief at the sight of the blessed essence, who thus spoke to my mother : Why mourest thou thus, Hagar ? To whom my mother : See, my Lord, there is the child, who, by your promise, was to be the father of a mighty nation, dying for thirst. I cannot see him die. The angel replied : Fear not, Hagar : the cry of the child has reached Jehovah : take him up ; I again say he shall increase to a mighty people. So saying, he disappeared. My mother's eyes were opened : Near her she saw a cistern of water ; with rapturous impatience she carried me to it ; she filled our bottle, and I drank. We now travelled on cheerfully ; and there is no expressing my mother's endearments to me. She settled in fertile Paran, where, as I grew up, I became famous in archery, and lived by my bow, till the goodness of God gave me the affections of the people of Paran, who chose me for their chieftain ; and my happiness was crowned in a conjugal union with the amiable Basmath. And frequently since, in various exigencies, in huntings, in encounters, I have received evident marks of an interposing providence, to secure the accomplishment of God's promise. In me, worthy Eliezer, be encouraged never to faint in thy confidence, where God has promised : still assuredly expect a joyful issue : our trust, where the end is good, is acceptable to God, even without the warrant of a promise, and not seldom the issue is seen to forestall our hope. A severe trial is often followed by a rich compensation ; the more valuable, for being thus acquired. This dries up my tears, and revives my spirit.

Thus

Thus conversed the generous youth and tender hearted old man, when a beam of hope irradiated Eliezer's heart ; and sorrow, expelled by Ishmael's reasoning, a while gave place to more tranquil motions. But now the evening's domestic business required his attendance ; and Ishmael remained alone ; he had comforted Eliezer, but friendship had given to his demeanour more ease than he felt in his heart. To abate his friend's agony, he had feigned hopes correspondent to his wish, but beyond what he could hope, and joining his hands with looks of deep affliction he thus supplicated : God of my mother El Roe, who sawest my misery, and hearing the voice of my supplication, didst deliver me from death ; O thou God of Abraham, hear me now, if ever thou heardst the ejaculations of a prostrate trembling breast ; graciously hear me, and turn not away thy face from my supplication ; though thy decree draws ripening tears from my eyes. Behold, on Isaac depends his tender mother's life, and all thy servant Abraham's consolation ; with that beloved youth will die all contentment and quiet of mind within the good man's family ; also his own powerful example, so attractive of imitation, in piety and the offices of worship. In him, if I may mention my concerns, I have the very best friend, an only brother, and who may be a second father to my children, when thou shalt call me to thy peace. With him falls the prop of Heber's race and Canaan's glory ; incessant lamentations will waste Sarah's few remaining days ; the crown wither on his father's head, and the whole family sunk under such a burden of afflictions. O spare this beloved child ; how many lives are included in his ! O be pleased to revoke this heart-rending command. Yes, Jehovah, if thou requirest the blood of a beloved child, though my throbbing heart recoils at the offer, there is my dear sinless Nabajoth, my first-born, his mother's joy, take him ; and spare Isaac, that his aged father and mother's grey hairs go not with sorrow to the grave.

Thus, from the fulness of his furcharged heart having prayed, he returned to the cottages. At the entrance of the tent, Nabajoth, with child-like sprightliness, came leaping towards him, and kissing his hand, and eagerly lisping, father, father, father. Ishmael taking the child in his arms,
passionately

passionately kissed him. Here a tear dropped from his eye, as he, in mind, repeated his address to God, and again offered to give up Nabajoth for Isaac.

To solicitous Eliezer and Abraham's son, the succeeding days moved heavily, clouded with sorrow, and brightened with faint gleams of hope; painful alternative! yet carefully disguised they their apprehensions, lest any suspicion should insinuate itself into Sarah's tranquil mind. She passed the days in quiet retirement, and some short intervals of conversation with Ishmael. Her constant companion was Keturah, of known fidelity, and long experienced in domestic concerns. Also many of those tender hours which she used to give to Isaac, were now bestowed on Ishmael's fondling, who in Sarah's face missed not his caressing mother. Thus had two serene days passed; but the dawn of the third morning, on the day of the sacrifice, a vision from the Lord presented itself to Sarah in her sleep: she starts up, trembling, and hastily called Keturah and Liliith, who came with no less haste, and anxious at so unexpected a call: Hear, and carefully remember what I now declare to be the cause of this early call. I have just now had a dream, which strangely troubles me. I was walking in the vale of Sharon, and, delighted with the lillies and roses, roved to the foot of Moriah, where I sat down under an olive tree; when an angel from a bright cloud descended, with a cedar shoot in his hand; he delivered it to be saying: Sarah, take this cedar, here plant it, and water it from the brook Siloah; under thy sedulous tendence it shall rise to the heavens, spread wide its shade, and amidst its leafy branches shall the birds of the air nestle. I had no sooner set it, and watered it from Siloah, than, the sun shining on it, it rose visibly, and extended like a cedar of the Lord on Lebanon. My heart overflowed with joy; I conceived a love for the tree, equal to that of a mother for the son of her barren years. I was continually under the shadow of its boughs, and the height of its tufted top gave me infinite pleasure. On a sudden, thunder shook the air, though cloudless; and from the serene heavens issued a flash, which entirely enveloped my favourite tree. I fled I know not how, till a little recovered, I sat down and wept bitterly, for this extraordinary de-

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struction

fruition of the tree ; but venturing to look back, instead of its being reduced to an ash, as I expected, it was standing entire, and amidst the heavenly flame looked more beautiful than before. My astonishment awakened me. This is my dream, and much does it affect me. What can be the meaning of so miraculous a representation !---An angel brings me the cedar, recommends to me to be particularly careful of it ; and by a strange inclination, I grow as fond of it as a mother of her infant at the breast---Then in a clear and fair sky, fire comes from heaven, and pours itself all over the cedar, yet without so much as damaging it.---A wonderful vision ! But, Keturah, I now recollect a saying of Isaac's, which he had from an angel, when at Haran ; that many dark events related to him, but the Lord was in them all---What if the cedar in my dream signified Isaac, who indeed was given to me by a miracle from God ? and hence it is I love him so ; but what sad mischance does this fire from heaven portend to my child ? Oh my fond heart, how it beats ! I may be too timorous ; for in every promise which we received from heaven, it is said, the Lord is with Isaac. Yet I cannot help trembling at the danger, in which his precious life may even now be involved. What direful stroke of fate awaits my harmless child ! Will another Tidal offer thee to Adramelech ! Art thou to be carried away by cruel robbers, and sold for a slave, we know not where---oh gracious heaven forbid ! But perhaps the trials thou must undergo are of the Lord's appointment ; much better is it to fall into his hands than those of man ! Whatever it be, the thought of Isaac's misery pierces me deeper, than if that misery affected myself alone. She ended, and affectionate tears filled her eyes ; when sage Keturah, in lenient words, thus answered :

Dearest lady, let not fleeting images, creatures of morning sleep, affright thee ; weep not at a dream. Often phantoms of vapourish texture, without substance or consequence, have had such an appearance of reality, as if formed by some meditative spirits : but be thy dream connected with truth ; grant it be sent by the Lord, to intimate Isaac's future fate ; should it not quiet thee, that a greater certainty than a vision seen in sleep secures thy son's welfare ; repeated

peated promises, with miraculous circumstances. Isaac shall live; from him shall arise the hope of mankind, the Lord's Anointed, the Restorer of all things; for this thou hast the unchangeable word of God. Then cease thus to afflict thyself; to this thy very dream encourages thee. Thou sawest thy so much loved cedar, when enveloped by the heavenly flame, not only entire, but with improved sightliness. So every trial which God shall please to lay on thy blessed son, will only serve to heighten the lustre of his virtue, without any hurt to his person.

Thus spoke Keturah; and the milky-tempered Lilith added her sympathizing intreaties: both joined to remove their lady's uneasiness; and not without such success, that Ishmael, who was made acquainted with the dream, had little difficulty to keep the fond mother in a state of composed expectation.

On the morning of the fifth day after Abraham's departure, Eliezer having withdrawn into the neighbouring fields, to pour forth his oraisons with the greater freedom, his ear was struck with a dull sound from the rising ground leading towards Moriah, as of people hastily advancing. He listened transported, and darting thitherward his eyes, he, after some time, through the distant mists, discerned three men, who soon increased to four, come on, with precipitate steps: at the sight his heart beat with anxious hope and fear alternately; he stood labouring under the fluctuations of opposite sensations, all violent. Trembling he viewed the travellers, till his heart assured him of Abraham's approach, this being the day fixed for his return: but what a return, if Isaac was not with him! This was the oppressive thought; but its weight decreased, when he plainly distinguished four persons and an ass. He now hastens to meet them, and hope animates his step. He came not unknown; Isaac had espied him, and came on before his father to rejoice the good old man with his presence. When Eliezer saw Isaac, whom he had lamented as dead, hastening towards him, he stood a while as fixed to the ground, with eyes heaven-wards, till joy again animating him, he ran to meet the eager youth; and long remained they silent in each other's warm embraces, till Abraham coming up, the ecstasied Eliezer thus raised his voice: Oh

Oh blessed day ! of all my days the most blessed ! be thou ever consecrated to the Lord, who has brought him back ! hail joyful hour ! hail bright morning, which givest me again to see him, who I feared was gone whence none return, into that tenebrous region where the light is as darkness ! And do I in reality embrace thee ! or is it as a dream !--Oh, it is thou thyself, dearest Isaac--Yes, it is thy sincere smile and lovely face : yes, we again see each other. What wonder of Providence has preserved thee ? By what means has Jehovah, in the riches of his goodness, rendered my apprehensions vain, and relieved my unbelieving heart ?

Worthy Eliezer, answered Isaac, suspend thy kind desire a while : When I have paid my duty to my mother, thou shalt hear all the great things which the Lord hath done for us, and we will join in a song of praise to Abraham's God who is so wonderful in his ways, and so rich in his goodness.

Eliezer now withdrew his arms from the youth, and turning to Abraham, bowed three times to the earth, blessing his lord, who taking him by the hand, pressed it with benign familiarity, which heightened the old man's joy. As they went on, a slave was dispatched to Sarah with the tidings of their return ; on which she hastened to the end of the avenue of palm-trees at the front of the tent. Isaac seeing her advancing, her countenance all flushed with joy, and eager to receive him in her arms ; now first, with animated pleasure, felt the restitution of his earthly life. The sight of his fond mother immediately effaced from his soft mind the splendor of celestial ideas : never with such rapture had he flown into Sarah's embrace, never so ardently pressed his heart to her's. She observed his transports, and in Abraham's countenance an elevation beyond whatever she had seen before. Ishmael now came to meet them, and having with respectful affection saluted his father, he with familiar cordiality embraced his brother. As Jacob, at Haran's well, when he understood that the beautiful shepherdess of such courteous demeanor was Bethuel's daughter, told her that he was Ribkah's son, and with enamoured heart kissed the abashed fair ; so embraced Ishmael his brother,

with

with transports of pious gratitude, that God had heard his prayer, yet spared his dear Nabajoth !

They now move towards the tent, amidst the congratulatory homages of the domestics. At the entrance stood Keturah and Timnah, with Azael, Isaac's favourite, respectfully expressing their joy. Being entered into the hall, two servants attended to wash their feet, whilst active Lilith prepared the table. No sooner was the repast ended, than Sarah thus addressed her lord :

Now, my dear husband, tell me what joyful news you bring from Zien : for in your august countenance, in the fire of your eyes, I plainly read that great are the things which you have seen ; and I am impatient to hear whatever concerns yourself and the child.

Isaac, with filial fondness, sat holding his mother's hand, and Abraham entered on the relation of his trial, and its happy issue ; how God Shaddai had ordered him to sacrifice Isaac, and how, out of concern for Sarah, he had concealed the order from her, and revealed it to Eliezer alone the severe conflict he had undergone, before he could bring nature to due resignation ; how he built an altar on Moriah ; how willingly Isaac had submitted to his apparent fate, and how he even placed himself on the altar ; lastly, how, when on the point of giving the fatal stroke, an angel called to him, signifying that the Lord was satisfied with his intended obedience, and proclaimed new blessings to his family. These events he related with an energy becoming their importance ; and during the affecting narrative, Sarah reclined her face against that of Isaac, sometimes with glowing cheeks, sometimes quite pale, but tears continually dropping ; often she kissed him, often pressed him to her heart ; then listened with earnest eye : but when in the course of the narrative the patriarch came to the sacrifice, and Isaac's resignation, her heart dissolved within her, a stream of tears gushed from her eyes, and she sunk on her son's neck, as fainting ; and he affectionately kissed off the tears from her faded cheek. Dear mother, how great is thy love of me ! to weep only at the idea of my death ! oh let not that sweet heart so afflict itself ! I am restored to you you have me in your arms, I am drying up your tears.

Sarah

Sarah recovering, looked up and smiled at Isaac's return of fondness, then desired Abraham to forgive the interruption. He continued the sublime relation, and all Sarah's sorrow was lost in exultation, on hearing the angel's benediction : her throbbing heart leaped in praise to God ; her sparkling eyes fixed on her husband, who thus concluded the interesting relation :

Behold how God has graciously averted the sad destiny which we conceived to hang over us, and which I felt as present ; he has turned our tears into delight and our sighs into thanksgiving. Let us praise him, my beloved spouse ; praise him all ye who hear my words ; while ye live praise him in your words and actions ; for it is he who hath delivered our life from death, our soul from despair, and hath crowned us with glory and blessedness.

Sarah, as raptured by the lute's inspiring strings, takes up the grateful theme, and opens her lips in ascription of praise to the merciful God of Abraham, from whom she now received Isaac a second time :

Yes, I will praise him, and magnify his name : every day, O my God, will I praise thee, and magnify thy name, without end ; thy goodness and thy truth endure for ever ; the earth, with all the generations thereof, is full of thy mercies ; but to none hast thou made thyself known as to the seed of Heber. Thou chosest Abraham, to shew thy loving kindness through him, unto all the ends of the earth. Faithful and gracious is the Lord ; therefore shall every thing that hath life praise him ; his most hidden ways are all in equity and goodness. O God, thou sawest my misery, before I had any sense of it ; my tears, my desolation, my distress at the death of Isaac, were present to thee ; thou hadst pity on me, and badeest him live. Therefore does my heart thank thee ; therefore bring I to thee the offerings of my lips ; for thou, O Lord, art my salvation. Now would I not die : I would live and declare thy works to Isaac's offspring. Isaac is a tree planted by the hand of Jehovah : he shall grow up, and flourish before the Lord ; like Zion, which cannot be moved, and whose verdure fadeth not. Before the beginning of days thy face was towards him, and thou anointedst him as thy chosen. O Lord, in thee will I
trust,

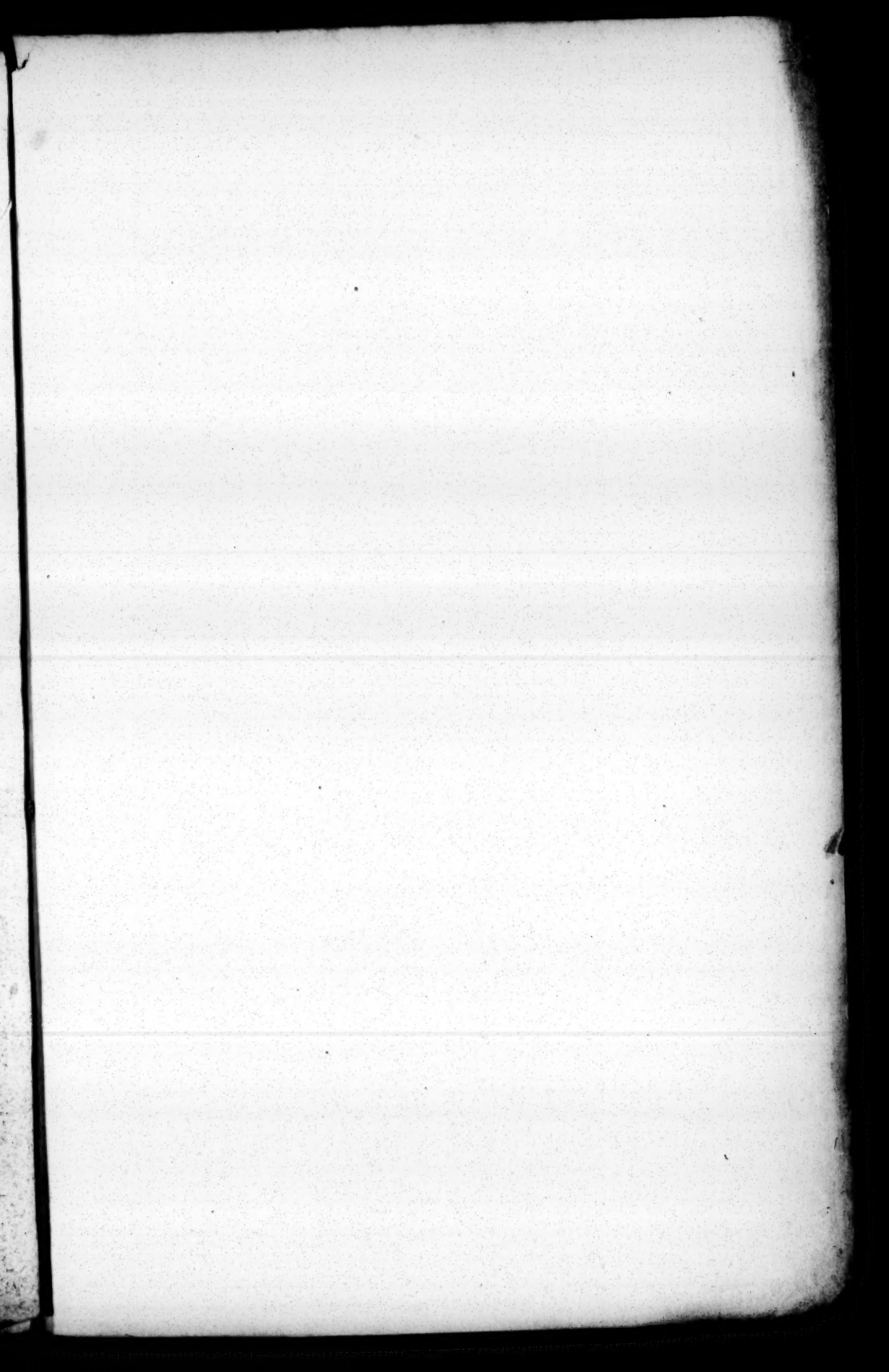
trust, for of thy goodness there is no end, and thy covenant standeth sure as the mighty hills. Praised be thy name; blessing, glory, and worship be unto thee, O God, for ever! Awake every lute and harp, awake each voice in Abraham's blessed family; awake, and chaunt Jehovah's goodness.

Thus spoke she divinely ecstasied, and the hearts of all present caught the noble flame.

Now the grateful patriarch gave directions for a festival offering, at which all his dependents were solemnly to present themselves, with songs of praise, before the God who had shewn wonderful loving kindness to him on Moriah. Fire from heaven, in token of divine acceptance, kindled the offering; the air rang with acclams and hymns from Abraham's dependents, all emulously joining in the devotion and joy of their benevolent lord.

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